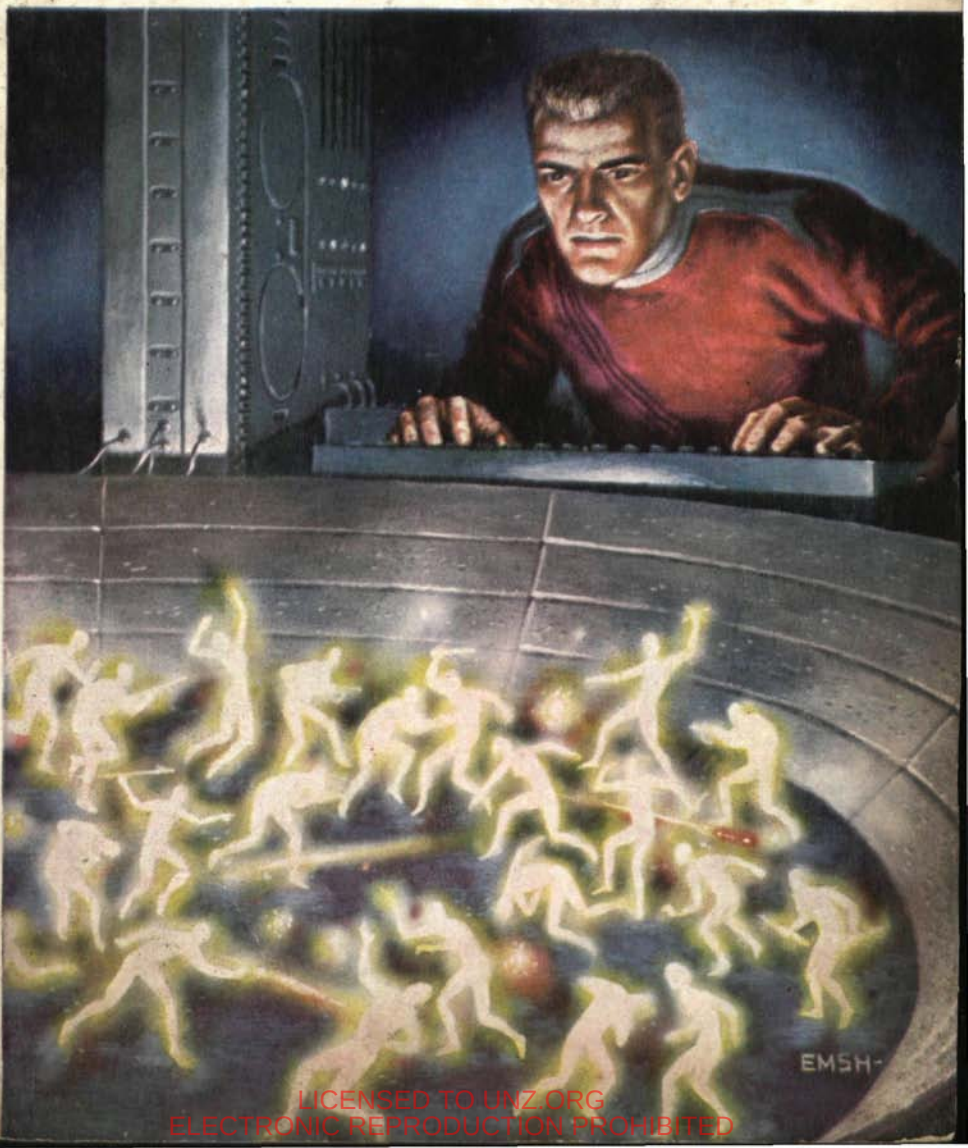
Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

JUNE 1954

35¢

GLADIATOR AT LAW
By Frederik Pohl and
C. M. Kornbluth



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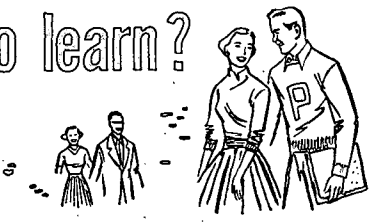

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JUNE, 1954 VOL. 8, NO. 3

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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CONTENTS

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—Installment 1 PAGE

GLADIATOR AT LAW
by Frederik Pohl & C. M. Kornbluth 6

NOVELETS

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN...*by William Tenn* 78
FORGET ME NEARLY.....*by F. L. Wallace* 124

SHORT STORIES

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.....*by Robert Sheckley* 55
HIGH MAN.....*by Jay Clarke* 68
SEE?.....*by Edward G. Robles, Jr.* 113

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION.....*by Willy Ley* 104

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE.....*by H. L. Gold* 4
FORECAST..... 103
GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF.....*by Groff Conklin* 118

Cover by EMSH Illustrating GLADIATOR AT LAW

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy.

Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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BREAKTHROUGH

LIKE any good story, science fiction or otherwise, the serial beginning in this issue, *Gladiator at Law*, operates on many levels besides plot:

- It has a logically and excitingly constructed society.
- Its characters are the inevitable products of that society.
- The society itself is equally inevitable *if certain factors come about*. As I've said before, we're not concerned with whether they *will*, only with whether they *may*.

In this serial, we have an exploration of a theme that, as far as I know, has never been treated in science fiction—the effects of a dramatic advance in architecture.

Our dwellings haven't been the products of accident since we left the caves. Even those were chosen because of environment, being warmer, drier and easier to defend than anything primitive Man was able to construct.

Warmth, shelter and defense—those have always been the primary needs in housing. Sometimes one or another becomes less important and others take their place — the mobility of nomad tents, the social prestige of ornamentation in mansions and palaces, the spiritual awe of temples and cathedrals. But each of these tells us explicitly what the times and those who did the building were like, for architecture is as eloquent a form of communication as literature, music or painting.

In many societies, defense was the first consideration. Treehouses may not be very comfortable, and they certainly attract insects, but they're fine for staying out of reach of predatory animals. Huts on stilts, far out in lakes, were dark and chilly — skulls of their owners indicate a high incidence of severe sinusitis —but they did keep off hostile tribes.

Probably the most extreme sacrifices to defense were Indian pueblos and medieval castles. Wherever possible, pueblo communities were built on sheer cliffs, which were scaled by ladders pulled up after the climbers—and so were the huts themselves, which had to be entered from the roof. Living in a castle is a contradiction in terms; every comfort was subordinated to defense, from the stench of the moat to the thick-walled deep freeze to the musty ventilation of windows that were actually slitted battle stations.

How far we've come from the

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menaces of the past is told hilariously and outrageously by T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings in *Homes of the Brave* (Knopf; $3.50) and illustrated even more outrageously by Mary Petty's ruthlessly funny drawings.

The chapter headings give a notion of the book's tone: Aboriginal "Modern," Low-Life "Modern," Movie "Modern," Interplanetary "Modern." There is another heading, directly related to *Gladiator at Law,* that I'll come right back to.

Warmth, shelter, defense and all other past motives for housing are mere adjuncts in *Homes of the Brave* to something entirely new—expression of the personality. How personality is expressed —and whose, architect, contractor, interior decorator or owner— is its ticklesome and yet downright grave theme. What it reduces to is that the personality expressed is laughable, pathetic or infuriating to the beholder.

Robsjohn - Gibbings' explanation is that "great architecture comes only with individual greatness," and the man he has in mind is the indisputably great Frank Lloyd Wright. As Voltaire said about something else entirely, it's a noble theory, contradicted only by the facts.

No architect, however great, can make his ideas survive in the wrong historic or geographic environment—not even Wright.

For example, did you know you can buy a European castle for $3,000? There are no takers, of course—castles serve no purpose now. Thus dangerous ages produce fortress homes and it's unreasonable to expect simplicity in a garish age, or lavishness in an austere one.

The chapter Dome, Sweet Dome is the one related to *Gladiator at Law.* You'll find bubble houses in the serial— though not the kind Mr. R-G rejects as fit for termites, Eskimos and Victorian wax flowers. Remember what Charles Fort said? Steam engines come along when it's steam-engine time! That's also true of architecture.

Examine the homes of any given era and you'll know the society they were an expression of and the personalities and principal needs of the people who built and lived in them.

There are two ruinous features in ours — building techniques are still handicraft; our buildings begin to deteriorate the moment they are completed. Imagine what overcoming those handicaps would mean!

That is just what Pohl and Kornbluth did. How does architecture influence a story? Well, picture *Morte D'Artur* set in a housing development. You see?

—H. L. GOLD

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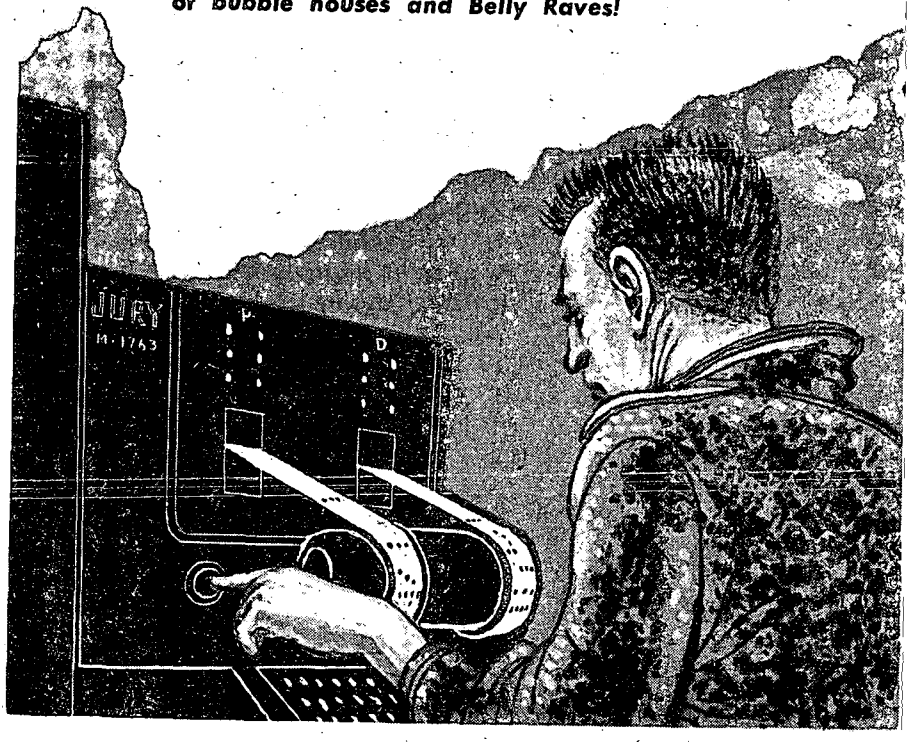
GLADIATOR AT LAW

By FREDERIK POHL & C. M. KORNBLUTH

PART 1 OF A 3-PART SERIAL

The authors of Gravy Planet *again tour the future—this time a world of bubble houses and Belly Raves!*



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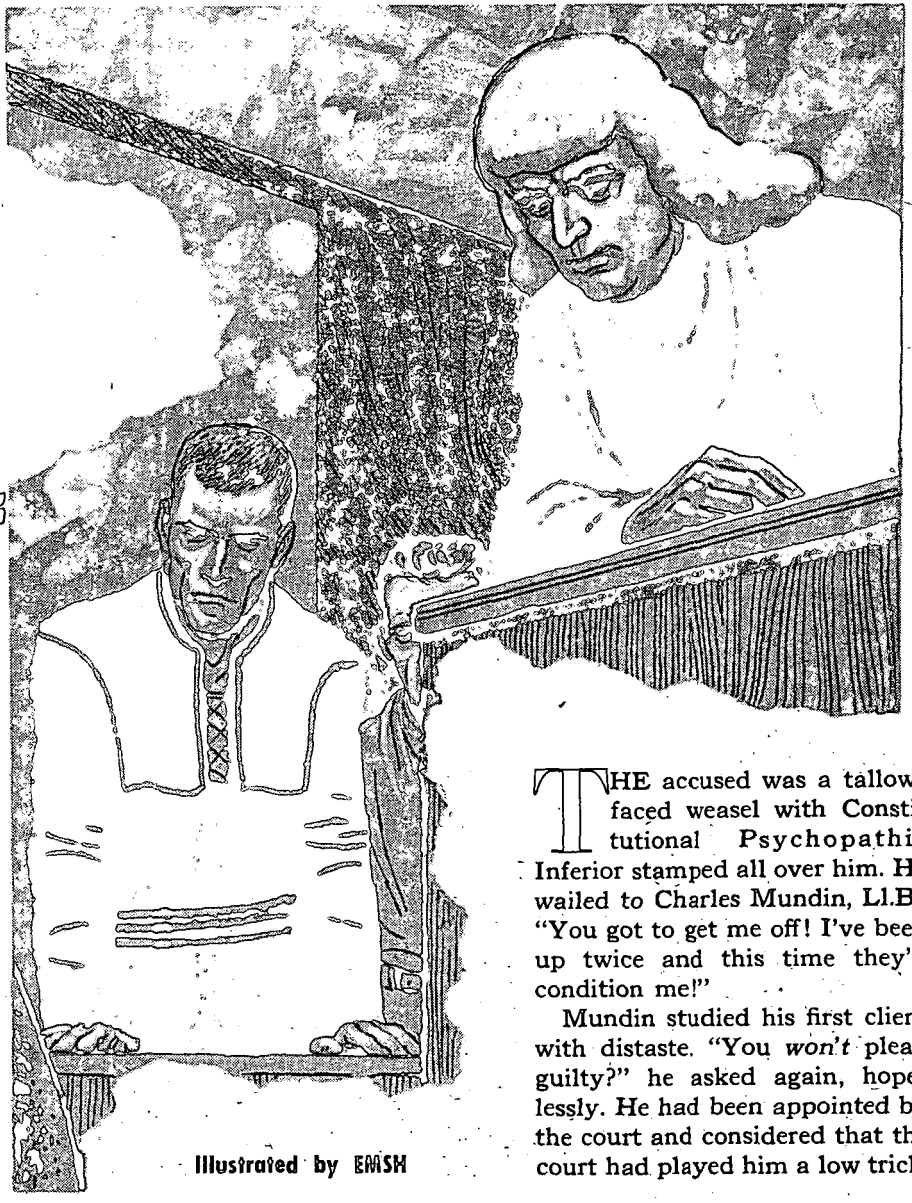

Illustrated by EMSH

THE accused was a tallow-faced weasel with Constitutional Psychopathic Inferior stamped all over him. He wailed to Charles Mundin, Ll.B., "You got to get me off! I've been up twice and this time they'll condition me!"

Mundin studied his first client with distaste. "You *won't* plead guilty?" he asked again, hopelessly. He had been appointed by the court and considered that the court had played him a low trick.

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His stubborn client's pore patterns were all over Exhibit A, a tin cashbox fishhooked from a ticket window at Monmouth Stadium. Modus operandi coincided with his two previous convictions. An alleged accomplice, who had kept the ticket clerk busy for almost all of the necessary five minutes, was ready to take the witness stand—having made his deal with the prosecutor. And still the fool was refusing to cop a plea.

Mundin tried again. "It won't be so bad, you know. Just a couple of days in a hospital. It's quite painless, and that's not just talk. I've seen it with my own eyes. They took us around in Junior year—"

"Counselor, you just don't understand. If they condition me, my God, I'll actually have to go to *work!*"

Mundin shrugged. "I'll do what I can for you."

BUT the trial was over in a matter of minutes. Mundin objected that the moral character of the witness made his testimony inadmissible in a conditionable offense. The prosecutor, a grandee from Harvard Law, haughtily smacked him down by pointing out that the essence of the conditionable offense lay in the motivation of the accused, not in the fact of commission which was all the accomplice had testified to. He then cited a series of precedents.

The judge's eyes went blank and distant. Those inside the rail could hear confirmation of the precedents droning faintly into his ears through the headphones under his elaborate wig. He nodded and said to Mundin, "Overruled. Get on with it."

Mundin didn't even bother to take an exception.

The prosecution rested and Mundin got up, his throat dry. "May it please the Court," he said. His Honor looked as though nothing had pleased that court, ever. Mundin said to the jury box; "The defense, contending that no case has been made, will present no witnesses." That, at any rate, would keep Harvard Law from letting the jury know of the two previous convictions. "The defense rests."

Harvard Law, smiling coldly, delivered a thirty-second summation which, in three razor-sharp syllogisms, demonstrated the fact that defendant was guilty as hell.

The court clerk's fingers clicked briskly on the tape-cutter, then poised expectantly as Mundin stood up.

"May it please the Court," said Mundin. That look again. "My client has not been a fortunate man. The product of a broken home and the gutters of Belly

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Rave, he deserves justice as does every citizen. But in his case, I am impelled to add that the ends of justice can be served only by an admixture of mercy."

Judge and prosecutor were smiling openly. The devil with dignity! Mundin craned his neck to read the crisp yellow tape that came clicking out of the clerk's encoding machine. He could read jury box code, more or less, if it were simple enough.

The encoded transcript of his summation was simple enough. The tape read—

o=o . . . o=o . . . o=o . . .

"Defense rests," he mumbled, ignoring a despairing croak from his client.

THE judge said, "Mr. Clerk, present the case to the jury box."

The clerk briskly fed in the two tapes. The jury box hummed and twinkled. If you could only fix one of those things, Mundin thought savagely, staring at the big seal on it. Or if you could get one of those damned clerks to cut the tape—no, that was out, too. The clerks were voluntarily conditioned. Traded freedom for a sure living.

The red window lit up. GUILTY AS CHARGED.

"Work!" the thief bleated.

The judge said, shifting his wig and showing a bit of earphone under it, "Mr. Bailiff, take charge of the prisoner. Sentencing tomorrow at eleven. Court's adjourned."

The thief moaned, "I hate them damn machines. Couldn't you have got me a human jury, maybe get an injunction?"

Mundin said wearily, "A human jury would have crucified you. Why did you have to steal from the Stadium? Why not pick on something safe, like the Church, or the judge's piggy bank?" He turned his back on the defendant and bumped into Harvard Law.

"Nice try, young man," the grandee smiled frostily. "Can't win them all, can we?"

Mundin replied rudely, "If you're so smart, why aren't you a corporation lawyer?" and stamped out of the courtroom.

He was on the street before he regretted the crack. Harvard's face had fallen satisfactorily, but the jibe was o=o if ever there was one. Why, indeed? For the same reason Mundin himself wasn't, of course. He hadn't inherited one of the great hereditary corporation law practices. Even grinding through Harvard Law School couldn't get you conveniently reborn into the proper families. And Mundin hadn't gone to Harvard. Not for Harvard—or for Charles Mundin — the great reorganizations, receiverships and debenture

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issues. Not for them the mergers and protective committees. For them—the mechanical jury box and the trivia of criminal law.

A morose, fifteen-minute walk through Monmouth's sweltering, rutted streets brought him to his office building. Some cluck from the sheriff's office was going to pick him up at 1400 for the rally. Besides being a member of the Criminal Bar, Charles Mundin, Ll.B., was foredoomed candidate for the Monmouth City Council on the Regular Republican ticket in the 27th Aldermanic District.

His wallet-nerve twinged at the thought, then twinged again as his eye fell on the quietly proud little plaque beside the door of the building. It announced that its rental agents were sorry, but could offer no vacancies. Mundin hoped rentals would stay that way, at least as far as his own office was concerned.

HE GOT an elevator to himself. "Sixteen," he told it. He was thinking of his first client. At least he would get a fee—you got one on conditionable cases. The crook was terrified that he'd find himself unable to steal. Maybe Counselor Mundin himself might soon be driven to dangling a hook and line over the wall of a ticket window at Monmouth Stadium.

Or he might get really desperate and find himself one of the contestants in the Field Day inside.

His mail hopper was empty, but his Sleepless Secretary—he was still paying for it—was blinking for his attention. The rental agents again? Lawbook salesman? Maybe even a client? "Go ahead," he said.

In its accurate voice, the machine reported, "Telephone call. 1205 hours. Mr. Mundin is out, madam. If you wish to leave a message, I will take it down."

Del Dworcas' outraged baritone shouted, "Who the hell are you calling madam?"

The secretary: "Gug-gug-*gug*—ow-*wooh*. Sir."

Dworcas: "What? Oh, one of those damn gadgets. Well, listen, Charlie, if you ever get this. I sent somebody over to see you. Named Bligh. Treat him right. And look me up at the rally. Something to talk about with you. And you better get that lousy machine fixed unless you want to lose some business."

The secretary, after a pause: "Is that the end of your message, madam?"

Dworcas: "Yes! And stop calling me madam!"

The secretary: "Gug-gug-*gug*—ow-*wooh*." And *click*.

Oh, fine, thought Mundin. Now Dworcas was sore at him, no doubt, and Dworcas was chair-

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man of the Regular Republican County Committee. And the secretary's confusion between the sexes and its banshee howl weren't covered by the service contract.

The mailtube popped while he was blaspheming the salesman who had flattered him into buying the secretary. He eagerly flushed the letter from its hopper, but when he caught sight of the return address, he dropped it unopened. It was from the Scholarship Realization Corporation. He knew he owed them the money and he knew, as a result of the law course they had paid for, that they couldn't attach his hypothetical income.

THERE was nothing to do until someone showed up — this Bligh or the man from the sheriff's office. Trying hard to think of the priceless publicity and contacts he was getting from his flier in politics, he took his account book out and added it up. It made him wince. The price of the priceless publicity and contacts to date was $854.32.

Of course, he reminded himself, the Party had laid out money, too. That TV time, for instance, when he was right there on the platform, must have cost a hunk of change. Of course, he hadn't actually *spoken*.

But his end included postage, stationery, truck rental, PA system rental, direct-mail fees, carfare, banquet tickets, fight tickets, Field Day tickets, fund-raising lottery tickets, charities, dues and entertainment. Then the rivers of beer, which he didn't enjoy, drunk with people he didn't like. And the bhang, which scared hell out of him, sipped with the teetotal Muslims of the 27th District. There was the way his doctor had tsk-tsked when he last stood in front of a fluoroscope with a barium meal coursing sluggishly through him.

And, of course, the certainty that he would be crushed like a bug on election day. And that The Boys—Dworcas was only one of The Boys—had played him for a sucker.

Sing "*Hey*" for the life of a lawyer, gabbling at machines that, he naggingly suspected, thought him not as bright as they were.

The Sleepless Secretary said, "Sir or madam, as the case may be. Gug-gug-*gug*. Regret to advise." Mundin kicked it savagely. It burped and said: "A gentleman is in the outer office, Mrs. Mundin."

"Come in!" Mundin yelled at the door.

The man blinked at him and came in cautiously. He looked around and picked out a chair. He wore a hearing aid, Mundin noticed. Perhaps that was why

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he cocked his head a little.

He said, "My name's Norvell Bligh. I—uh—asked Mr. Dworcas if he could recommend a first-class attorney and he—uh—he suggested you."

Mundin asked aloofly, "What can I do for you?"

BLIGH'S eyes roamed nervously around the room. "My wife—that is, I would like to get some information on adoption. I have a stepdaughter—my wife's daughter by her first marriage, you see—and, well, my wife thinks we should arrange about adopting her."

Good old Del Dworcas, Mundin thought savagely. He *knows* I belong to the Criminal Bar, yet he goes right ahead . . . He said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Bligh. I can't help you. You'll have to find a civil attorney to handle that for you."

Bligh touched the control of his hearing aid.

"Beg pardon?"

"*I—can't—do—it!*"

"Oh, I know *you* can't," Bligh said. "Mr. Dworcas explained that. But he said that the civil attorneys would charge an awful lot, while you . . . That is, since you're a friend of his and I'm a friend of his brother, it could be done on a friendly basis. All I need to know, really, is what to do. I don't think I'd have to have a lawyer in court, do you?"

Mundin pondered hopefully. "Maybe not." It was questionable practice, no doubt of it, and small thanks to Dworcas for getting him into it. Still, if it was just a matter of advice and information—thank God, the corporation boys didn't have *that* sewed up.

He leaned back, covertly looking Bligh over. Tolerably well dressed, certainly not a deadbeat. He'd be some kind of contract worker, no doubt, getting his regular pay, living in a G-M-L house, suffering his wife's obvious nagging.

Mundin said, "Tell me the story. First of all, the court will want to be sure you can earn enough to support the child."

"Well, I've *been* supporting her for three years. Excuse me, Mr. Mundin, but can we keep this short? I'm on my lunch hour and Mr. Candella is very fussy about promptness."

"Certainly. Just give me the facts."

NORVELL BLIGH coughed self-consciously. "I'm an associate producer for General Recreations, in charge of Field Day procurement, mostly. My wife is named Virginia. She was married before I met her to a man named Tony Elliston. They didn't get along too well—it was

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a pretty rough experience for her. They had one daughter, Alexandra. Virginia's first husband died. I have the papers here. Alexandra is 14 now. Anything else?"

Mundin scribbled rapidly — purely pretense, since the Sleepless Secretary was recording the whole thing automatically. On second thought, he told himself, maybe not pretense at that, considering the way it was acting. He put down his pencil.

"That's enough for the time being," he said. "I'll have to look up—have to discuss this matter with one of my colleagues. Come back Friday at this time."

As Bligh left, looking vaguely alarmed, the Sleepless Secretary said, "Pending the receipt. Ow-*woooh*. Mrs. Mundin is out of of town."

Mundin turned it off.

Two clients in one day, he thought wonderingly. Anything was possible. Perhaps he would even win the election. Perhaps he wouldn't, after all, have to let the finance company reclaim the secretary and the Scholarship people garnishee his income and the landlord toss him out on the street.

Perhaps.

THE RENTED sound truck, with the man from the sheriff's office driving, rolled slowly past glowering red brick fronts and stone stoops crowded with liquid-eyed women and their skinny, brownish kids. Mundin didn't like this neighborhood. It was on the outskirts of the city, too close to Belly Rave for safety, too close to the factories and the yards for comfort. But he didn't have to *live* here, even if the miracle should happen and he got elected.

He chanted wearily into the mike at the indifferent Ay-rabs of the 27th, "My friends, don't miss the big free rally tonight at Republican Hall. Learn the truth, don't be misled. The Regular Republican Party promises inside plumbing for every family. We promise stockyard workers paid time off for noon prayers and doubling the bonus for handling pork. My friends, don't miss the big free rally. Don't fail to miss the big free—"

"*Hey!*" the driver cried.

Mundin put his hand over the mike. "*Damn!* Right out of my subconscious, that one." He uncovered the mike and said, "Don't *miss* the big free rally. The Regular Republicans are the party of Lincoln, the party of Eisenhower. We stand for inside plumbing. Learn the truth at the big free rally . . ."

The liquid eyes stared entirely without interest. Mundin subsided and turned on the sound tape.

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The speaker horns began to blare *You and Me and the Moon.* Apathetically, he noted that one of the older Ay-rab women wore a veil. Unusual, nowadays.

The driver leaned over and nudged him. "You'll never get anywhere with the Ay-rabs, Mr. Mundin," he said confidentially. "We had a good crowd in the 27th before the war. Poles and Irish. The Poles voted Republican—you only had one Republican party then, you know. And the Irish voted Democrat. But then the packers began flying in the Ay-rabs and now you don't know where you stand."

Mundin nodded indifferently.

They passed somebody's G-M-L bubble house, obviously an early model, before the corporation figured out the bubble-city plan, and it was showing its age. Mundin could see the family taking their ease in the living room. He chuckled. Their polarizer was out of order and they didn't know it.

But the driver was shocked. He stopped the truck and honked, pointing indignantly through the wall. The man heard the honking and hastily strode to a manual control. The wall opaqued.

The truck rolled on. The driver muttered something about goddam fishbowls. "I'm a married man," he added indignantly and irrelevantly.

"Yeah," said Mundin. "Say, the hell with 85th Street. Turn around—let's go back to the club."

He flicked off the speakers in mid-chorus. It made no difference to the dark, liquid eyes: they followed the silent truck as uncaringly as they had the blaring horns.

"My friends," Mundin said to the dead microphone, "vote for my opponent. He's as big a liar as I am, but he can afford this and I can't."

Which was also irrelevant, for he was stuck with it now.

II

THIS fellow Mundin might not not be much of a lawyer, Norvie Bligh told himself on the way back to his office, but at least he probably wouldn't charge much. Arnie Dworcas had as much as promised him that.

Anyway, who needed a legal eagle to put adoption papers through? The whole thing was downright silly. If only Ginny weren't so touchy lately, you could explain to her that it was just an unwarranted expense, that nobody was going to take Alexandra away from them, that there wasn't any question about who'd inherit his contract status and bubble house if he died.

He considered that for a mo-

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ment. Virginia had certainly seemed to take that part of it seriously, he thought. She had mentioned it half a dozen times. "Don't forget to ask him about inheriting." And, of course, he had forgotten. Well, there would be another chance on Friday.

You couldn't really blame Virginia if she felt a little—well, insecure. Life with that Tony must have been pure hell, living in Belly Rave from hand to mouth. That was why she was such a devoted wife.

Of *course* she was a devoted wife, he told himself.

Right now, though, the important thing was whether Candella was going to say anything about his being fifteen minutes late. Candella was pretty difficult lately. Naturally, you couldn't blame him for being jumpy, with the big Fall Field Day coming up and all.

Of course you couldn't blame Candella. Of course you couldn't blame Virginia, or Arnie Dworcas when his promises didn't jell, or Alexandra when she was a little touchy, like any 14-year-old, of course.

Of course you couldn't blame anybody for anything. Not if you were Norvell Bligh.

Fortunately, Candella didn't notice what time he came back from lunch. But in the middle of the afternoon, the boss's secretary came hurrying out to Norvie's desk and said, "Mr. Candella would like to discuss your Field Day program with you."

He went in with a feeling of uneasiness.

Old man Candella slapped the papers down and roared. "Bligh, maybe you think a Field Day is a Boy Scout rally, where kids shoot arrows and run footraces around a tennis court. Maybe you think it's a Ladies' Aid pink tea. Maybe you just don't know what a Field Day is supposed to be. Is that it?"

NORVIE BLIGH swallowed. "No, sir," he whispered.

"'No, sir,'" Candella mimicked. "Well, if you *do* know what a Field Day is, why isn't there at least one good, exciting idea in this whole bloody script? I take back that word 'bloody.' There might be some complaints in the other direction, but I guarantee there wouldn't be any complaints that there was too much blood."

He jabbed at the program with a hairy forefinger. "Listen to this. 'Opening pageant—procession of jeeps through gauntlet of spearmen. First spectacle—fifty girl wrestlers versus fifty male boxers. First duet—sixty-year-old men with blowtorches.' Ah, what's the use of going on? This is supposed to be the big event of the year,

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Bligh. It isn't a Friday-night show in the off season. This is the one that counts. It's got to be *special*."

Norvie Bligh shifted miserably. "Gosh, Mr. Candella, I — I thought it *was*. It's a classical motif, don't you see? It's like—"

"I can tell what it's like," Candella bellowed. "I've been producing these shows for fifteen years. I don't need anybody to tell me whether a script will play or it won't—and I'm telling you this one won't!"

He stabbed a button on his console.

Norvie felt the seat lurch warningly underneath him and barely managed to scramble to his feet as it disappeared into the wall.

"Take this script away," Candella growled. "We've got to start casting on Monday. Let's see if we can have something by tomorrow night." He didn't even look up as Norvie cringed out the door.

Norvie dictated and erased five tapes. He sent his three assistants on three different errands of research, to find the best spectacles on the highest-rated Field Days in every major city. Nothing they brought back was any help.

When Miss Dali came in to pick up the afternoon's dictation and he had to face the fact that there was no afternoon's dictation, he grumbled to her, "What do they expect in that moldy gym they call a stadium here? Look at Pittsburgh—we're twice as big and *they* have armored half-tracks."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Dali. "Mr. Stimmens would like to see you."

"All right," he replied ungraciously and dialed a chair for his junior scriptwriter.

"Excuse me, Chief," Stimmens said hesitantly. "Can I see you for a moment?"

"You're seeing me." Norvie had picked that bon mot up from Candella the week before.

STIMMENS hesitated, then blurted much too rapidly, "You've got a great organization here, Chief, and I'm proud to be a part of it. But I'm having a little trouble—you know, trying to get ahead, hah-hah—and I wonder if it wouldn't be better for you, Chief, as well as me if . . ." He went on through a tortuous story of a classification clerk's mistakes when he had finished school, and an opening in Consumer Relations, and a girl who wouldn't marry him until he got a Grade Fifteen rating.

Long before Stimmens had come anywhere near the point, Norvie knew what he wanted and knew what the answer had to be. But Candella's bruises were fresh on his back and he let Stimmens go on till he was dry. Then, briskly, "Stimmens, *if* I'm not in

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error, you signed the regular contract before you joined us."

"Well, yes, sir, but—"

"It has the usual provision for cancellation. I believe you know the company's policy in regard to selling contracts. We simply cannot afford to sell unless the purchase price is high enough to reimburse us for the employee's training time—which, in your case, is all the time you've spent with us, since you have clearly failed to master your job. I'm surprised you should come to me with such a request."

Stimmens stared at him. "You won't let me go?"

"I can't. You're at liberty to cancel your contract."

"*Cancel!* And go back to Belly Rave? Mr. Bligh, have you ever been in Belly Rave?" He shook his head like a man dispelling a nightmare. "Well, sorry, Mr. Bligh. Anything else for me to do today?"

Norvie looked at his watch. "Tomorrow," he growled. As Stimmens slumped away, Norvie, already feeling ashamed of himself, petulantly swept the chair back into the wall.

It was almost quitting time.

He made a phone call. "Mr. Arnold Dworcas, please . . . Arnie? Hello, how're you? Fine. Say, I saw that attorney, Mundin, today. Looks like everything will be all right . . . Uh-huh. Thanks a lot, Arnie . . . This evening? Sure. I was hoping you'd ask me. All right if I go home first? Ginny'll want to hear about the lawyer . . . About eight, then."

ARNIE Dworcas had a way of chewing a topic interminably and regurgitating it in flavorless pellets of words. Lately he had been preoccupied with what he called the ingratitude of the beneficiaries of science.

At their frequent get-togethers, he would snarl at Norvie, "Not that it matters to Us Engineers. Don't think I take it personally, just because I happen to be essential to the happiness and comfort of everybody in the city. No, Norvie, We Engineers don't expect a word of thanks. We Engineers work because there's a job to do, and we're trained for it. But that doesn't alter the fact that people are lousy ingrates."

At which point, Norvie would cock his head a little in the nervous reflex he had acquired with the hearing aid and agree, "Of course, Arnie. Hell, fifty years ago, when the first bubble cities went up, women used to burst out crying when they got a look at one. My mother did. Coming out of Belly Rave, knowing she'd never have to go back—"

"Yeah. Not that that's evidence, as We Engineers under-

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stand evidence. It's just your untrained recollection of what an untrained woman told you. But it gives you an idea of how those lousy ingrates settled down and got smug. They'd change their tune damn fast if We Engineers weren't on the job. But you're an artist, Norvell. You can't be expected to understand." And he would gloomily drink beer.

Going home from work and looking forward to seeing his best friend later that night, Norvie was not so sure he didn't understand. He even felt inclined to argue that he wasn't an artist like some crackpot oil painter or novelist in a filthy Belly Rave hovel, but a technician in his own right! Well, kind of—his medium was the emotional fluxes of a Field Day crowd, rather than torques, forces and electrons.

He had an important job, Norvie told himself—Associate Producer, Monmouth Stadium Field Days. Of course, Arnie far outstripped him in title. Arnie was Engineer Supervising Rotary and Reciprocal Pump Installations and Maintenance for Monmouth G-M-L City.

Not that Arnie was the kind of guy to stand on rank. Hell, look at how Arnie was always doing things for you—like finding you a lawyer when you needed one, and . . . Well, he was *always* doing things for you.

It was a privilege to know a man like Arnie Dworcas.

III

CHARLES Mundin, Ll.B., just parked the truck for the sheriff's man—*he* was too busy—and entered Republican Hall through the back way.

He found Del Dworcas in the balcony—the Hall was a slightly remodeled movie house—telling the cameramen how to place their cameras, the sound men how to line up their parabolic mikes, the electricians how to use their lights.

Mundin stood on the sidelines, faintly hoping one of the cameramen would extract a few of Dworcas' front teeth with a tripod leg, but they kept their tempers admirably. He sighed and tapped the chairman on the shoulder.

Dworcas gave him the big hello and asked him to wait in the manager's office—he had to get these TV people squared away, but it wouldn't take more than a few minutes. "Did you see that fellow Bligh?" he asked. "Yeah? Good. Soak him, Charley; you got to make a living, you know. Some friend of my brother Arnie's. Now go on down to the office. Couple of people there for you to talk to." He looked annoyingly mysterious.

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Mundin sighed again. At the foot of the stairs, he yelled in astonishment, "Great God Almighty! Prince Wilhelm the Fourth!"

William Choate IV jerked around and looked confused, then stuck out a hand for Mundin to grasp. He was a pudgy little man of Mundin's age, a classmate from John Marshall Law School, heir to a mighty corporate practice, a tidy dresser, former friend, solid citizen and four-star jerk. "Why, hello, Charles," he said uncertainly. "Good to see you."

"Likewise. What are *you* doing here?"

Choate made a mighty effort and produced a shrug. "Oh," he said, "*you* know."

"Meaning that even a corporation lawyer has political dealings once in a while?" Mundin helped him out.

"That's it exactly!" Choate was pleased. It was just like old times. Mundin had always helped him out, all the way through John Marshall Law.

Mundin looked at his former protégé with emotions that were only distantly related to envy. "It's a pleasure to run into you, Willie," he said. "They keeping you busy?"

"Busy? *Whew!* You'll never know, Charles." That was a very unfortunate remark, Mundin thought. "You know the I. G. Farben reorganization?"

"By reputation," Mundin said acidly. "I'm in criminal practice right now. Incidentally, I had an interesting case today—"

"Yes," Choate said. "Well, you might say I've won my spurs. The old man made me counsel for the Group E Debenture Holder's Protective Committee. Old Haskell died in harness, you know. Think of it—forty years as counsel for the Protective Committee! And with a hearing before the Referee in Receivership coming up. Well, I won *my* spurs, as you might say. I argued before the referee this morning, and I got a four-year stay!"

"Well," Charles Mundin said. "To use a figure of speech, you certainly won your spurs, didn't you?"

CHOATE beamed. "I thought you'd see it that way. I simply pointed out to old Roseheaver that rushing through an immediate execution of receivership would work a hardship on the committee and I asked for more time to prepare our suits for the trust offices. Old Roseheaver thought it over and decided it would be in the public interest to grant a stay. And, Charles, he congratulated me on my presentation! He said he had never heard the argument read better!"

"Well done," said Mundin. It

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was impossible to resent this imbecile. A faint spark of technical interest made him ask, "How did you prove hardship?"

Choate waved airily. "Oh, that was easy. We have this smart little fellow in the office, some kind of distant cousin of mine, I guess. He handles all the briefs. A real specialist—not much at the Big Picture, you know, but he could prove old man Winthrop was starving in the gutter if you told him to. I'm joking, of course," he added hastily.

Poor Willie, thought Mundin. Too dumb for Harvard Law, too dumb for Columbia, though he was rich enough to buy and sell them both. That was how he wound up at John Marshall, which had carried him for eight years of conditions and repeats until memorizing had worn grooves in his brain that carried him through his exams. Mundin compassionately had written most of his papers.

And poor dumb Willie glowed: "You know what that little job is worth? The firm's putting in for two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, Charles! And as counsel of record, I get half!"

That did it. Poor Willie thought he was just letting good old Charles know that the protégé at last was a success on his own. But his kindly idiocy broke Mundin.

"Willie," he begged hoarsely, "give me a job. You know I've got the brains. You know you never would have got through school if it hadn't been for me, and I never asked for a nickel. There were plenty of sharks around who would have soaked you plenty and still not got you through. Please, Willie. I can be a smart little fellow in your office just as well as somebody's cousin. Give me a chance. Law clerk. The bottom. Anything!"

WILLIE said dismally, "Gosh, Charles, I don't think we can do that. The old man wouldn't understand at all if I asked for somebody who wasn't in the family. Be fair, Charles. What would you do in my place?"

Mundin hopelessly knew what he would do. He would keep the lucrative practice of corporate law right in the grip of the family. He would sit on top of his practice with a shotgun in his lap.

"I understand, Willie," he said heavily.

Willie glowed. "I knew you would, Charles. After all, it's *got* to be a family affair. Why, with any luck, I'll hand the Group E Debenture Holders' Protective Committee down to William Choate the Fifth!"

"Thank you, Willie," Mundin said gently. "Must you go now?"

"Must I? Oh. I guess I must.

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It's been good seeing you, Charles. Keep up the good work."

Mundin stared impotently at his pudgy back. Then he turned wearily and went on to Dworcas' office.

Dworcas had still not arrived. The manager's office, behind the closed-up ticket booth, was tiny and crowded with bales of literature in Arabic and English. Two people were waiting there — a young man and a young woman — obviously brother and sister. Big sister, kid brother; they were maybe twenty-eight and twenty-two.

The girl got up from behind one of the battered desks. No lipstick, cropped hair, green slacks, a loose plaid shirt.

"I'm Norma Lavin," she said. "Mr. Mundin?"

"Yes." Why was good old Del passing this screwball on to him?

"This is my brother Don."

Don Lavin had something weird and something familiar about him. His eyes drew the attention. Mundin had often read of "shining eyes" and accepted it as one of those things you read that don't mean anything. Now he was disconcerted to find himself looking into a pair of eyes that actually did shine.

"Please sit down," he invited uneasily.

The girl said, "Mr. Dworcas tells us you're a lawyer, Mr. Mundin, as well as our next councilman from the 27th District."

MUNDIN automatically handed her one of his fancy cards. Don Lavin looked a little as if he had been *conditioned*. That was it! Like a court clerk or one of the participants in a Field Day—or, he guessed, never having seen one, a criminal after the compulsory third-rap treatment.

"I'm a lawyer," he said. "I wouldn't swear to that part about being councilman."

"You're the best we can do, Mundin. We got nowhere in Washington, nowhere in Chicago, nowhere in New York. We'll try local courts here. Dworcas passed us on to you. We have to start *somewhere*."

"Somewhere," her brother very dreamily agreed.

"Look, Miss Lavin—

"Just Lavin."

"Okay, Lavin, or Spike, or whatever you want me to call you. If you're through with the insults, will you tell me what you want?"

Del Dworcas stuck his head in the door. "You people getting along okay? Fine!" He vanished again.

The girl said, "We want to retain you for a stockholders' committee—G-M-L Homes."

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G - M - L Homes, Mundin thought, irritated. Why, that meant the bubble houses. The bubble cities, too. It meant real estate in practically continental lots. It meant the private roads, belt lines, power reactors . . .

It wasn't a very funny joke.

The shiny-eyed boy said abruptly, "The 'L' stands for Lavin. Did you happen to know that?"

Mundin tried to glower. He couldn't. Suppose — just suppose — that maybe it wasn't a joke. Ridiculous, of course, but just suppose—

G-M-L Homes.

Such things didn't happen to Charles Mundin, Ll.B. "I'm not licensed to practice corporate law," he said flatly. "Try William Choate the Fourth."

"We just did. He said no."

They made it sound real, Mundin thought admiringly. Of course, it couldn't be. Somewhere it was written—*Charles Mundin will never get a fat case.* Therefore, this thing would piffle out.

"Well?" demanded the girl.

"I said I'm not licensed to practice corporate law."

"Did you think we didn't know that? We dug up an old banger who still has his license. He can't work, but we can use his name as attorney of record."

"Well," he began hazily, "it's naturally interesting—"

"Yes or no?"

Dworcas stuck his head in again. "Mundin, I'm awfully sorry, but I've got to have the office for a while. Why don't you and your friends go over to Hussein's for a cup of coffee?"

"Sure, Del," Mundin said dazedly. "Thanks. Ah—will I get any broadcast time?"

"Afraid not this time, Charlie. They cut us down to fifteen minutes and old man Ribicoff showed up and we had to give him five. You know how he is."

"Yeah. Thanks for trying, Del."

HUSSEIN'S place, across the street, was pretty full, but they found a low table on the aisle.

The old-timers in fezzes stared at the strange conditioned face of Don Lavin. The kids in scat hats with five-inch brims looked once and then away, quickly.

Norma Lavin got no stares at all. Young and old, the Ay-rabs looked coldly through her. Mundin suddenly realized that he was doing his political chances no good by being seen in public with her. The Ay-rabs blamed modern women—quite wrongly, as it happened—for the disconcerting way their own women were changing.

Hussein himself came over. "Always a pleasure, Mr. Mun-

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din," he beamed. "What will you have?"

"Coffee, please," Mundin said. Don Lavin shook his head absently. Norma said nothing.

"*Majun* for the lady?" Hussein asked blandly. "Fresh from Mexico this week. Very strong. Peppermint, raspberry, grape?"

Norma Lavin icily said, "*No.*" Hussein went away, still beaming. He had delivered a complicated triple insult—by calling her a lady, offering her a narcotic and, at that, one traditionally beloved by Islamic women denied love by ugliness or age.

Mundin masked his nervousness by studying his watch. "We have about ten minutes," he said. "If you can give me an idea of what you have in mind—"

Somebody coming down the aisle stumbled over Don Lavin's foot.

"I beg your pardon," Lavin said automatically.

"What's the idea of tripping me?" asked a bored voice. It was a cop—a big man with an intelligent, good-humored face.

"It was an accident, Officer," Mundin said.

"Here we go again," Norma Lavin muttered.

"I was talking to this gentleman, I believe." The cop asked Don Lavin again, "I said what's the idea of tripping me? You a cop-hater or something?"

"I'm really very sorry," Lavin answered dreamily. "Please accept my apology."

"He won't," Norma Lavin whispered angrily to Mundin.

"Officer," Mundin said sharply, "it was an accident. I'm Charles Mundin, candidate for the Council in the 27th, Regular Republican. I'll vouch for this gentleman."

Ignoring him, the policeman said to Lavin, "Suppose we show some identification, cop-hater."

LAVIN took out a wallet and spilled cards on the table. The cop inspected them and growled, "Social Security account card says you're Donald W. Lavin, but Selective Service registration says you're Don Lavin, no middle initial. And I see your draft registration is with an Omaha board, but you have a resident's parking permit for Coshocton, Ohio."

Lavin said somnolently, "I'm extremely sorry, Officer."

The cop decisively scooped up the cards and said, "You'd better come along with me, Lavin. Your career of crime has gone far enough. It's a lucky thing I tripped over you."

Mundin noted that he had dropped the pretense of being tripped. "Officer, I'm taking your shield number. I'm going to tell my very good friend Del Dworcas

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about this nonsense. Shortly after that, you'll find yourself on foot patrol in Belly Rave—the two-to-ten shift—unless you care to apologize and get the hell out of here."

The officer shrugged. "What can I do? When I see the law broken, I have my job to do. Come along, Dangerous Don."

Lavin smiled distantly at his sister, and went along.

Mundin's voice was shaking with anger. "Don't worry," he told Norma Lavin. "I'll have him out of the station house right after the meeting. And that cop is going to wish he hadn't been born."

"Never mind. I'll get him out," she said. "Five times in three weeks. I'm used to it."

"What's the angle?" Mundin exploded.

Hussein came up with coffee in little cups. "Nice fella, that Jimmy Lyons," he said chattily. "For cop, that is."

"Who is he?" Mundin snapped.

"Precinct captain's man. Very good to know. The uniform is just patrolman, but when you talk to Jimmy Lyons, you talk right into precinct captain's ear."

Norma Lavin stood up. "I'm going to get my brother sprung before they start shunting him around the precincts again." Her voice was weary. "I suppose this is the end of the road, Mundin. But if you still want to consider taking our case, here's the address. Unfortunately, there's no phone." She hesitated. "I hope you'll—" It was almost a cry for help.

She bit off the words, dropped a coin and a card on the table and strode from the coffee shop. The Ay-rabs looked icily through her as she went.

Mundin sat at the little table, bespelled, turning her card over in his fingers. G-M-L Homes, he thought. Corporate practice. It's not generally known that the "L" stands for Lavin.

And a cry for help.

The card said *Norma Lavin,* with an address in Coshocton, Ohio, and a phone number. These were scratched out, and written in was 37598 *Willowdale Crescent.*

An address in Belly Rave!

Mundin shook his head involuntarily. But there had been a cry for help.

THE big free rally, attended by perhaps eighty-five voters, went off on dreary schedule. Mundin managed to see Dworcas for a moment after things broke up. "Del, what's with these Lavin people? What do you know about them?"

"Not a hell of a lot, Charlie. I thought I was throwing some business your way. They mentioned a stockholder's suit. Are

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they phonies or crackpots?"

"Maybe. I don't know. But some cop named Jimmy Lyons picked the kid up in Hussein's. No reason that I could see."

"*Jimmy* Lyons? He's the captain's man. I'll call and see what I can do about that, Charlie."

He called and came back, smiling. "The sister identified him. They held him a couple of hours to cool him off and let him go. Lyons just got sore because the kid gave him some lip. What the hell, cops are human. Charlie, maybe you'd better forget about these people. The desk man said the kid was conditioned or doped up or something."

"Conditioned, I think. The wise kids at Hussein's kind of eyed him fast, if you know what I mean."

"Sure, Charlie, sure." Del was beginning to look uncomfortable. Mundin let him go.

IV

IT HAD been a trying evening for Norvie Bligh. When he walked in on Virginia and her daughter, they had been perfectly normal—sullen. His news about the lawyer, Mundin, and the prospects of adopting Alexandra had produced the natural effects. "You forgot to ask about the *inheritance!*"

Before he finished dinner, he was driven to the point of shrieking at his wife, slapping the girl and slamming out of the house.

But there was always Arnie Dworcas.

He killed time for half an hour —Arnie didn't like it if you got there too early—and then hurried. He was almost out of breath as he got to Dworcas' door.

And Arnie was warmly friendly. Norvell began at last to relax.

It wasn't just a matter of plenty of beer and the friendly feeling of being with someone you liked. Arnie was going out of his way, Norvell saw at once, to get at the roots of Norvell's problem. As soon as they had had a couple of beers, he turned the conversation to Norvell's work. "They must be really beginning to roll on the Field Day," he speculated.

Norvell expanded. "Sure. I've got some pretty spectacular things lined up for it, too. Of course, Candella hasn't given me the final go-ahead—" he frowned at a submerged memory— "but it's going to be quite a program. One gets a big charge out of doing one's best on a big job, Arnie. I guess you know that. I remember a couple of years ago—"

Dworcas interrupted. "More beer?" He dialed refills. "Your place has quite a good reputation," he said with sober approval. "This afternoon, in the shop, We Engineers were talking about

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the technical factors involved."

"You *were?*" Norvell was pleased. "That's interesting, Arnie. This time I was talking about—"

"Especially the big shows," Dworcas went on. "The Field Days. You know what would be interesting, Norvell? Getting a couple of the fellows to go to one, to see just how the thing looked from the engineering viewpoint. I'd like to go myself—if I could get away, of course. We're pretty busy these days. Might invite a few of the others in the shop to come along."

"You *would?*" Norvell cried. "Say, that would be fine. There's a lot of engineering connected with a Field Day. Like this time a couple of years—"

"Excuse me," Arnie interrupted. "Beer. Be right back."

WHILE Dworcas was gone, Norvell felt actually cheerful. Arnie was concerned with his work. You didn't find many friends like Arnie. Warmed by the beer, Norvell re-examined his recent blinding depression. Hell, things weren't too bad.

He had almost decided to have a swift cup of black coffee and go home when Arnie came back, beaming. "Well, what say, Emotional Engineer? Want a couple of real, live slide-rulers to look over your show?"

"What? Oh, sure, Arnie. Just let me get this Field Day out of the way. We'll throw a real party—one of the Friday-night shows. There's a lot of complicated stuff under the stadium. You'd be interested—"

"I don't know," Dworcas said doubtfully, "whether the fellows would be interested in one of the second-rate shows. Maybe we ought to skip it."

"No, no! The regular shows are just as interesting technically. Why, just last week, we had a broken-field run—barbed wire and maimer mines——and half an hour before the show started, the director came around, crying that he didn't have enough men for the spectacle. Well, Candella—that is, *we* put in a quick call to the cops and they sent a squad down to Belly Rave. Got twenty-five volunteers in fifteen minutes. The orderlies lined 'em up and gave them million-unit injections of B_1." He chuckled. "Arnie, you should have seen some of those guys when they sobered up. We had to—"

Arnie was shaking his head. "That sort of thing isn't what We Engineers are interested in. It's the big effects."

"Oh! You mean like in the Field Day next week." Norvell thought vaguely about the Field Day. "Yeah," he said uncertainly, "there certainly are plenty of headaches when you run a Field

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Day. Can I have another beer, please?"

As he dialed another glass, Dworcas said sunnily, "Suppose you fit us in, then. After all, you've got eighty thousand seats. There ought to be five somewhere that the man who runs the whole damn thing can give to a friend."

"Sure," Norvell mumbled. "Uh —my turn. Excuse me, Arnie."

When he came back, the room wasn't spinning quite so dizzily, but the warmth in his body wasn't so gratifying, either. He stared so long at the glass of beer by his chair that Arnie thought it was flat and pressed a replenishment button.

"Oh, thanks," Norvell said, startled. He picked up the glass and took a sip, then put it down hard. Half of it slopped over. Above the whistle of the suction cleaners draining the spilled beer, Norvell said with sudden misery, "Arnie, I'm in trouble."

Dworcas froze. He said carefully, "Trouble?"

"I swear to God, if it weren't for people like you—if it weren't for you *personally*— I don't know what I'd do!" He told Dworcas about the grisly dinner with his wife and stepdaughter, about the countless run-ins with Candella, about all the fights and frustrations. "The worst was this morning, just before I went to that lawyer. I was chewing out that little punk Stimmens when Candella walked into the room. He must've heard every word I said, because when I turned around and saw him, he said, 'Excellent advice, Mr. Bligh, I hope you'll follow it yourself.' And Stimmens just stood there, laughing at me. I couldn't do a thing. For two cents, I would have gone in and asked for my contract."

Dworcas nodded precisely. "Perhaps you should have."

"What? Oh, no, Arnie, you don't understand. General Recreations is lousy on that. They won't sell unless they can get their pound of flesh, and plenty more besides. We had a vice president once, a couple of years ago, got in Dutch with the board and wanted out. Well, they set a price of *four hundred thousand dollars* on his contract. He killed himself. It was that or cancel."

"That's a point to remember, Norvell. In any engineering problem, there are always at least two components to any vector."

"I see what you mean. There's no way out."

"No, Norvell, there are *always* two ways out, sometimes more."

"Well—"

"At the shop," Arnie said, leaning back, "these problems don't arise, of course. Not like with you temperamental artists. But when I was a journeyman, I . . .

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Well, it was rough. I know just what it's like. And, of course, I know what *I* would do."

"What?"

"If it were my decision, I'd cancel."

NORVELL goggled. He was suddenly sober. "You'd *cancel?*"

"That's right," said Arnie. "I'd cancel."

Norvell looked at him unbelievingly, but Dworcas' gaze was calm and benign.

"It's a tough decision to make, Norvell. Heaven knows, I'd find it a hard one to make myself, without half an hour or more of serious thought. But what's your alternative?"

Norvell shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He put his beer down. Neither man said a word for a long time, while Norvell's mind raced from Candella to Dworcas to the lawyer, Mundin, to Virginia, to Stimmens, to a fire-red mystery marked "Belly Rave," to the old man who had sat weeping while he waited for the broken-field event to start.

"I don't think I ought to," Norvell said faintly.

Dworcas inclined his head. "It's your decision."

"I just don't see how I can, Arnie. I'd lose the house, Virginia would raise holy—"

Arnie stopped him. "You may be right. Who knows? There's certainly no security in the world for a man without a contract job. You'd have to leave your home, true, and move to the suburbs—" Norvell blinked— "at least temporarily. It's a hard life there, a constant challenge to prove yourself—to make your way in spite of hell or high water—or fall by the wayside." He looked speculatively at Norvell and dismissed the subject. "I just wanted to give you the benefit of my thinking on the point. You do as you see fit. I guess you'll want to be getting home."

"Sure," Norvell said. "Oh, I meant to thank you for steering me to that lawyer. I don't know what I would have—"

"Think nothing of it. I'm always glad to do anything I can for you, you know that. You won't forget about the tickets?"

"Tickets?" Norvell asked vacantly.

"The tickets for the Field Day. Not general admission, you know. As close to the Master's box as you can get them."

Norvell's eyes opened wide. He said in a thin voice, "Arnie, you were bragging to your boss that you could get tickets, even though they've been sold out for six weeks. Isn't that it?" They stared nakedly at each other; then Norvell's eyes fell. "Just kidding," he mumbled. "I'll get them."

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VIRGINIA was still awake, but there was only a minor squabble over the music coming from behind Alexandra's locked door. Norvell made the mistake of commenting that it was past midnight and a 14-year-old should be asleep.

His wife said furiously, "Should be this, and should be that, and should do everthing Mr. Bligh wants her to. This whole house isn't organized around you. It's *our* home, too, and—"

Norvell had had all he could take. "It's the *company*'s house and one more word out of you and I give it back to them. Then you two prize packages from Belly Rave will be right back where you belong."

Virginia's face stiffened in shocked surprise. Norvell stalked downstairs to the bar and poured himself a drink.

He sat with it in his hand and looked in sudden wonder at the room around him.

Was there so much difference between a G-M-L bubble house and Belly Rave? He decided he'd have to visit Belly Rave one of these days. Just to get a look. But what could the difference be?

A house was a house. If you didn't like the floor warm, you dialed it to cool. If you didn't like the wall color or pattern, you turned the selector wheel to something else. If you didn't like a room plan, you clipped the wall somewhere else.

Norvell dialed a bed and set the house to full automatic. As he lay down, his pillow chimed softly, but he didn't need sleepy music that night. He reached over his head and turned it off.

In the copper plexus at the house's core, transistors pulsed, solenoids barred the doors, microswitches laid traps for intruders, thermocouples dried the incoming air and cooled it. Commutator points would boil the water for the coffee in the morning, heat the griddle for the eggs, set their breakfast dishes.

Naturally — Norvell thought sleepily—that's what a house *was*.

V

FOUR taxi drivers flatly refused to take Mundin to Belly Rave. The fifth was a reckless youngster. "Just took this job waiting for the draft call," he confided. "How can I lose? You're paying plenty and maybe I'll get beat up so bad in this here Belly Rave place that they won't draft me." He laughed. "Fact is, I've never been out there, but I figure it can't be as tough as they say."

Mundin did not contradict him, though he felt a lot less certain, and off they went.

There was no sizable city that

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did not have the equivalent of Belly Rave. Festering slums that had once been respectable suburban residential sections, like Belle Rève Estates, they had been abruptly made obsolete by the G-M-L bubble houses — good enough for derelicts to live in, not good enough to keep in repair. The battered streetlights, Mundin noticed, didn't light; the yards were weed-grown; roofs were rotted through, walls sagging.

To one who had always lived in bubble houses, the place was shocking. He had thought the early bubble houses were ludicrous because the automatic controls sometimes went out of order and manual ones had to be used temporarily. But these primitive structures — even someone like himself, with no more than a layman's knowledge, saw instantly that this old-style architecture must have taken an incredible number of man-hours just for upkeep.

He asked himself indignantly why this architectural jungle wasn't torn or burned down and bubble houses put up. He knew the answer, of course — G-M-L Homes. They could manufacture the units, but their advertising explained why they didn't. Living in a bubble house was a mark of success. And so they limited production, maintained an artificial scarcity value . . . and doomed people to Belly Raves, or whatever the local name was, in every city.

Hell with it, Mundin thought in annoyance; he had his own troubles. He hadn't come out to Belly Rave to worry about it; he was there on a job. *If* he was lucky and it turned into a real, honest-to-God case.

There was life in Belly Rave—a furtive, crepuscular life called into being by the unpoliceable wilderness of tall weeds, wrecks of homes, endless miles of crumbling pavement. Scatty little cars prowled the cracked roads, occasionally pulling to the curb when a dim figure swung a phosphorescent handbag.

THE taxi passed one block of houses that was a blaze of light and noise. A doorman trotted alongside the cab, urging, "Anything goes, mister. Spend the night for five bucks, all you can drink and smoke included. Why pay taxes, mister?"

Sometimes, though not often, the Alcohol & Hemp Tax Unit raided such joints.

The driver asked, "We anywhere near 37598 Willowdale Crescent?"

"What you need is a guide," the doorman said promptly. "Jimmy!" Somebody jelled out of the dark. Mundin heard a fum-

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bling at the cab door.

"Step on it!" he yelled at the driver, snapping the door lock. The driver stepped on it.

Ambush left behind, they cautiously approached bag-swingers for directions and before long were on the 37,000 block of Willowdale Crescent, counting houses.

"This must be it," said the driver, no longer devil-may-care.

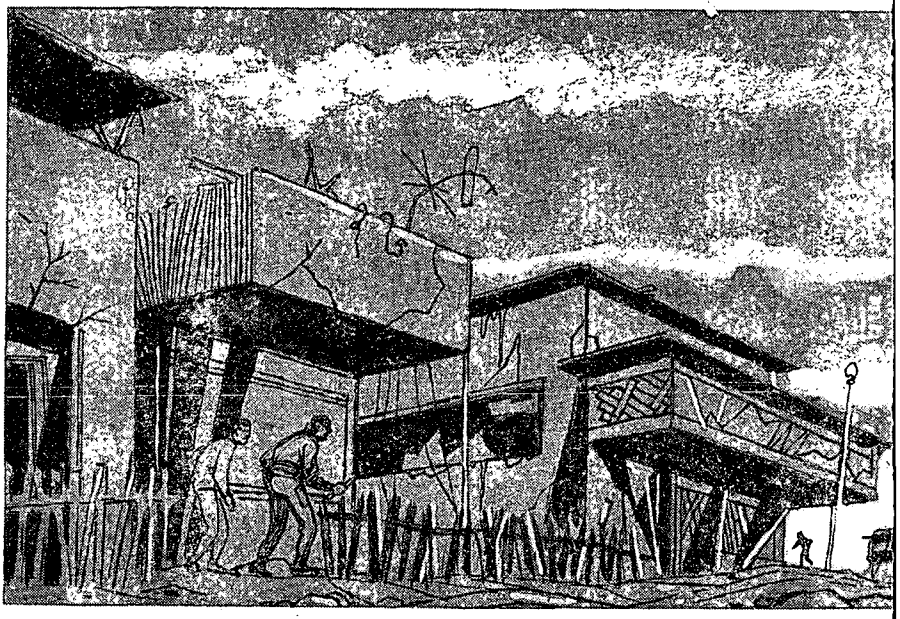
"I guess so. Wait here, will you?"

"No, sir! How do I know you ain't going to slip through a back door? You pay me what's on the clock and I'll wait."

The meter read a whopping eight dollars. Mundin handed over a ten and started up the crumbled walk.

The taxi zoomed away before he had taken half a dozen steps. Mundin cursed wearily and knocked on the door. He studied the boarded-up picture window while he waited. Like all the others, it was broken, boarded up. Inevitably, in the years that had gone by since they were eased and puttied carefully into place, the rock had been flung, or the door had been slammed, or the drunk had lurched into the living room.

The man who came to the door



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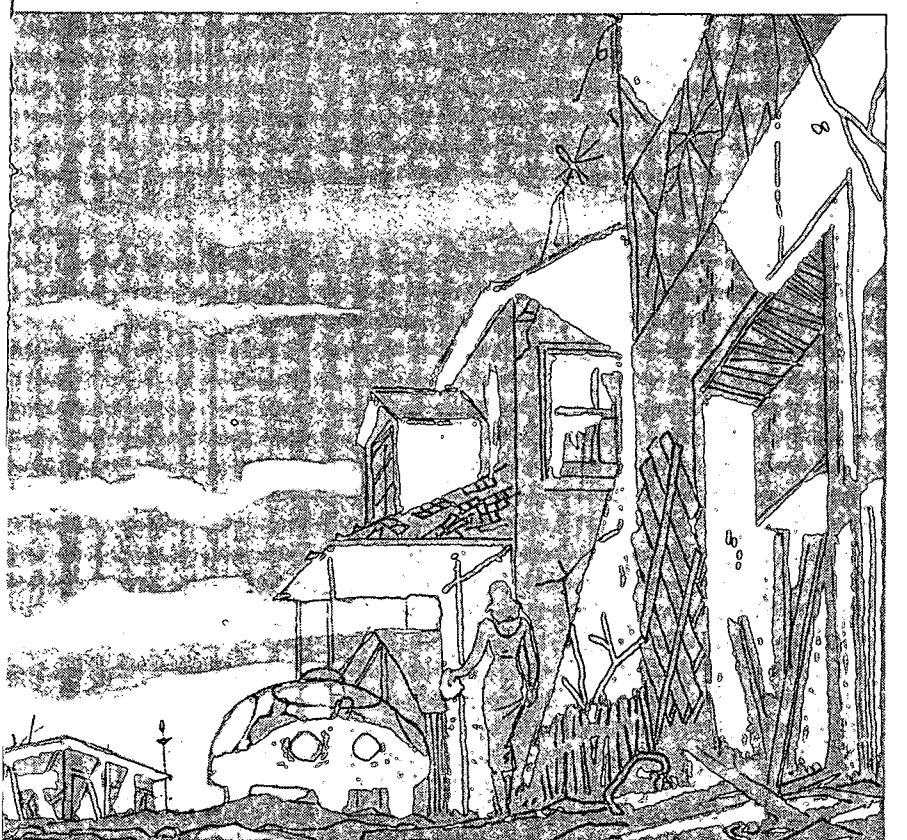
was old and visibly sick.

"Is this the Lavin place?" Mundin asked, blinking against a light haze of wood-smoke. "I'm Charles Mundin. She asked me to call in connection with a legal matter. I'm an attorney."

The old man started at the word. "Come in, Counselor," he said formally. "I am a member of the bar myself—"

He broke off into a fit of coughing that left him leaning against the door.

MUNDIN half carried him into the living room and eased him into a sagging, overstuffed chair. A Coleman lamp, blowing badly, cast a metallic blue-green



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glare into every corner of the room. A fire smoldered in the hearth, billowing against a closed register. A tinny radio was blaring, "—was kept from spreading, though the four houses involved in the arson attempt were totally destroyed. Elsewhere in Belly Rave, warfare broke out between the Wabbits and the Goddams, rival junior gangs. One eight-year-old was killed instantly by a thrown—"

Mundin clicked it off and opened the register. The smoke began to clear from the room and the fire to flicker. The old man was still folded up in the chair, his parchment face mercilessly bleached by the flaring light. Mundin fiddled aimlessly with the valve and somehow got it to stop roaring. There was a green glass shade; he put it on and the room was suddenly no longer a corner of a surrealist hell, but simply a shabby room.

"Thank you," the old man muttered. "Counselor, would you please see if there is a small, round tin in the bathroom cabinet?"

The bathtub was full of split kindling and the cabinet shelves loaded with the smaller household staples—salt, spices and such. There was an unmarked tin, which Mundin pried open. Small, gummy-looking pills and an unmistakable odor—yen pox! He shuddered and brought it out.

The old man took it and slowly swallowed five of the opium pills. When he spoke, his voice was almost steady. "Thank you, Counselor. And let this be a lesson to you. It's weakening, humiliating. You said you had an appointment with Norma? She should have been here hours ago. Naturally—this neighborhood—I'm worried. I'm Harry Ryan. Member of the S.E.C. Bar and other things. Of course—" he stared at the tin of yen pox—"I'm retired from practice."

Mundin coughed. "Miss Lavin mentioned you, though not by name. You would be attorney of record and I'd do the legwork in some sort of stockholder's suit, right?"

Ryan nodded. Mundin hesitated, then went on to tell the old man about the arrest in Hussein's place.

"YES," Ryan said matter-of-factly. "I told her it was a mistake to go to Mr. Dworcas. It is inconceivable that Green, Charlesworth would neglect to have an understanding with the Regular Republican Central Committee."

Green, Charlesworth was the name of an investment house usually mentioned in hushed and tremulous tones. Mundin said, "She told me it was connected

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with G-M-L Homes. How does Green, Charlesworth come into it?"

Ryan chewed another opium pill. "Not in more than two dozen ways—that I know of." He actually smiled. "Raw materials, belt transport patents, real estate, insurance, plant financing—" He heaved himself from the overstuffed chair as the door knocker rattled. "I'll get it," he said. "It was just a temporary indisposition. You needn't mention it to . . ." He jerked his chin at the door.

He came back into the living room with Norma and Don Lavin.

"Hello, Mundin," she said tonelessly. "I see you found us. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Then excuse us while we have something. The Caddy broke down five times on the way out here. I'm beat."

She and her brother morosely opened a couple of self-heating cans of goulash. They spooned them down in silence.

"Now," she said to Mundin, "the background. I'll make it short. Don and I were born of rich but honest parents in Coshocton, Ohio. Daddy—Don, senior—was rather elderly when we came along. He spent the first fifty years of his life working. He started out as a plastics man with a small factory—bus bodies, fire trucks, that kind of thing. He happened to have gone to school with a man named Bernie Gorman, who happened to have specialized in electronics and electrical stuff. The two of them worked together, when they could find time, dreaming dreams and weaving visions. They were dedicated men. They invented, designed and constructed the first pilot model of the G-M-L Home, otherwise known as the bubble house."

Mundin said frostily, "I happen to know a little about G-M-L, Miss Lavin. Wasn't there a man named Moffatt involved?"

"Not until later — much later. For almost thirty years, Daddy and Mr. Gorman starved themselves, gave up everything for their dream. Mother said she scarcely saw Daddy from month's end to month's end. Mr. Gorman died a bachelor. They had designed the bubble house, they had built it, but they didn't have the capital to put it on the market."

MUNDIN objected, "They could have leased the rights."

"And had them bottled up," she said. "Didn't I tell you they were dedicated men? They had designed a home that was cheaper than the cheapest and better than the best. It was a breakthrough in housing, like nothing that had

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gone before except, perhaps the revolution in synthetic textiles. Don't you see that even a millionaire could not have owned a better house? Daddy and Mr. Gorman wanted to give their dream to the people at a reasonable profit. They weren't big businessmen, Mundin — they were dreamers. They were out of their field. Then Moffatt came along with his plan."

Ryan stirred himself. "Most ingenious, really. By leasing manufacturing rights to large corporations, G-M-L avoided capital outlay; the corporations gave their employees what could not be had elsewhere—and good-by to labor troubles. At first, G-M-L leased the rights for money. Later, when they got bigger, the consideration was blocks of stock, equities in the leasing firms."

The girl nodded soberly. "Within ten years, it owned sizable shares of forty corporations, and Daddy and Mr. Gorman owned half of G-M-L. Then Daddy found out what was happening. He told Mr. Gorman and I think it killed him—he was an old man by then, you see. Contract status. One word of backtalk and you get thrown out of your G-M-L house. Get thrown out of your G-M-L house and you find yourself—here."

Mundin said wonderingly, "But if your father was one of the owners of the company—"

"Only twenty-five per cent, Mundin. And Mr. Gorman's twenty-five per cent went to distant cousins. So there was Daddy, at sixty-five. His vision was a reality—his bubble homes housed a hundred million people. But they had become a weapon and he was frozen out of the firm."

Don Lavin said dreamily, "They gave the plant guards his picture. He was arrested for drunk and disorderly when he tried to go to the stockholders' meeting. He hanged himself in his cell." He stared absently at Mundin's shoe.

Mundin cleared his throat, "I'm sorry. Wasn't there anything to be done at all?"

RYAN said, with a touch of professional admiration, "Very little, Mr. Mundin. Oh, he still had stock. They impounded it. A trumped-up creditors' committee got an order on his safe-deposit box against dissipation of assets when he died. They kept it impounded for twelve years. Then somebody got careless, or somebody quit or got fired, and the new man didn't know what the impoundment was for. Anyway, the order expired. Norma and Don Lavin are twenty-five per cent owners of G-M-L."

Mundin looked around the shabby room and said nothing.

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"There's just one little thing," Norma said bitterly. "Don got the stock out of the box and put it away. Tell us where it is, Don."

The brother's dreamy eyes widened. His face worked wildly. He said, "K-k-k-k-k-k" in a convulsion of stammering. The terrified stutter went on and on, and then Don Lavin began raspingly to cry. Norma, stone-faced, patted him on the shoulder.

SHE said to the appalled lawyer, "When we began making trouble, as they called it, Don was snatched. He was gone for three days. A doctor he went to says he must have got more than fifty hours of conditioning."

"That's illegal! Private persons can't use conditioning techniques!"

"You're our lawyer now—just straighten that out for us, will you? Get an injunction against G-M-L."

Mundin sat back. Habitual criminals—like his client earlier in the day—were conditioned in twenty hours of treatment spread over a week or more. Good God, fifty hours in three days! But proving it against G-M-L or anyone else—that was the hard part. The conditioned person was naturally conditioned against taking any action of the sort.

He felt ill. "Sorry I was so stupid. So now you want to find the stock and Don doesn't know where he put it."

Ryan looked at him with disgust. "I could manage to get duplicate certificates. Unfortunately, our position is not that simple. Donald, as the male heir, was the obvious person to conduct a suit, so Norma signed an irrevocable proxy of interest to him. That was an error, as it turned out. Donald can't bring suit. He can't tell us where the stock is. He can't even discuss it."

Mundin nodded sickly. "I see. You're stymied."

Norma made a contemptuous noise. "Now that it's established that we're licked, we might as well lie down and die."

"I didn't say that, Miss Lavin. We'll do what we can." He hesitated. "For instance, no doubt we can have your brother undergo a deconditioning course somewhere else. After all—"

"'Private persons can't use conditioning techniques,'" she quoted derisively. "Didn't you say that just a moment ago?"

"Well, yes, but surely *someone* will—"

Norma seemed to collapse. She said to Ryan, "*You* tell him what he's up against."

Ryan said, "G-M-L's assets are not less than fourteen billion dollars, comprising cash in the bank, negotiable securities, plant

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and properties and equities, as of their last statement, in eight hundred and four corporations. I don't say that they can break the law with impunity, Counselor, but they can sure as hell keep *us* from breaking it."

FOURTEEN billion dollars! Mundin, trudging apprehensively through Belly Rave's dark streets, felt very small, pitted against fourteen billion dollars.

A mournful hooting from the shadows made him quicken his step, but no lurking thugs showed up. Mundin shivered uncomfortably and turned up his coat collar. It had begun to rain.

Luck was with him. He was neither mugged nor lured into one of the clip joints. The footpads were stalking other streets; the roving gangs of armed adolescents plotted in their cellars instead of braving the rain; the cab Mundin spotted, ran after and hailed was a legitimate cab, not a trap.

The ride gave him time to think. But the thinking came to very little. The Lavins, he was convinced, had a legitimate claim. He had promised them he would work on it; he had tried to reassure them that things were not as hopeless as they seemed. He felt uncomfortably sure that the girl had seen through his empty words.

The cab came at last to territory he recognized and he stopped it at an all-night restaurant. Coffee might help, he thought. While he was waiting for it, he invested in a call to his office—you could never tell, maybe someone had phoned.

Someone had. The Sleepless Secretary groaned and came across with the record of a familiar, scared voice: "Mr. Mundin—uh—this is Norvell Bligh. Can you come and get me out of jail?"

VI

NORVIE woke up with a start. They were joggling him, with identical, contemptuous smiles. Even in the fog of sleep, he felt a little stab of pride at Virginia's beauty, a twitch of unhappiness at the same lean beauty smothered beneath the adolescent fat of her daughter.

"What's the matter?" he croaked.

His voice sounded odd and he realized he wasn't wearing his hearing aid. He groped for it beside the bed. It wasn't there. He sat up.

He yelled at Alexandra, "Where is it? If you've hidden it again, I'll break your neck!"

Alexandra looked smugly shocked. She mouthed at him,

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"Goodness, Norvell, you know I wouldn't do that," though he had repeatedly told her that exaggeration made it impossible to read lips.

Virginia tapped him on the shoulder and said something, stiff-lipped. He caught an "eep" and a "larm."

"What?"

"I said you must have come in too drunk to set the alarm before you went to sleep. Get up. You're an hour late for work now."

He leaped from bed. An hour late on this day, of all days!

He found the hearing aid—on the floor in the entrance hall, where he couldn't have left it, any more than he could have failed to set the alarm. But he didn't have time to take up these minor points. He depilated in ten seconds, bathed in five, dressed in fifteen and shot out of the house.

Fortunately Candella wasn't in. Norvie sent Miss Dali to round up his staff and began the tooling-up job for the integrator keyboard, while the production men busied themselves with their circuits and their matrices, and the job began. This was the part of Norvie's work that made him, he confessed secretly to himself, feel most like God. He fed the directions to Stimmens, Stimmens fumblingly set up the punch cards, the engineers translated the cards into phase fields and interferer circuits . . . and a World That Norvie Made appeared in miniature.

He had once tried to explain his feelings to Arnie. Arnie had snarled something about the presumptuous conceit of a mere pushbutton. All he did, Arnie explained over many glasses of beer, was to decide what forms and images he wanted to see; it was the Engineers who, in Their wisdom, transmuted empty imaginings into patterns of light and color that magically took the form and movement of tiny fighters and wrestlers and spear-carriers. The original thought, Arnie explained severely, was nothing; it was the tremendous technical skill that transformed the thought into visual reality that was important. And Norvell, perforce, humbly agreed.

EVEN now, he was deferential to the production men, those geniuses so well versed in the arts of connecting Circuit A to Terminal IV, for they were Engineers. But his deference extended only to the technical crew. "Stimmens!" he barked. "Hurry it up! Mr. Candella will be here any moment!"

"Yessir," said Stimmens, hopelessly shuffling the stacks of

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notes from Norvell's hands.

Stimmens was coming along, Norvell thought. A touch of the whip was good for him.

It took twenty minutes and a bit more, and then Norvell's whole design for a Field Day was on punch cards. While Stimmens was correcting his last batch of cards, the production men began the run-through. The little punched cards went through the scanners; the packed circuits measured voltages and spat electrons; and in the miniature mockup of the Stadium, tiny figures of light appeared and moved and slew each other and left.

They were Norvell's own, featureless and bright, tiny and insubstantial. Where Norvell's script called for the bodies of forty javelin-throwers in the flesh, the visualizing apparatus showed forty sprites of light jabbing at each other with lances of fire. No blood spilled; no bodies stained the floor of the Stadium; only the little bodiless fire-figures that disappeared like any other pattern of excited ions when the current went off.

Somehow, Norvell thought of the Field Days themselves as taking place here. He had heard the cries of the injured and seen the drawn faces of the next of kin; but it was as mannikins that he thought of them, always.

One of the production men said approvingly, "Looks like a good show, Mr. Bligh."

"Thanks," said Norvell gratefully. It was always a good sign when the technical crew hung over the miniature stadium this way, watching the mockup figures go through their paces.

Now the question was, what would Candella say?

"BLIGH, the upcoming Field Day is important," was what Candella said to Norvie. "At least, it seems to *me* that everything we do is important. Don't *you* think so?"

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Norvell said, "Well, of course!"

"Our work *is* important, Bligh. It is a great and functional art form. It provides healthful entertainment, satisfying the needs of every man for some form of artistic expression. It provides escape—escape for the hard-working bubble-house class, escape for the masses of Belly Rave. It siphons off their aggressions. Allotments and Field Days—our society is built on them! You might call our work the very foundation of society. Do you agree?"

"Yes, sir," Norvie almost whispered.

Candella looked politely apologetic. "I beg your pardon?"

"*Yes, sir!*" Norvell, too late, found he was almost bellowing.

Candella looked pained. "You needn't shout. There is nothing wrong with *my* hearing." Norvell winced. "Foundation of our society, but also an art form. The cultured classes appreciate our efforts on the artistic plane. The rabble of Belly Rave—with all respects, my dear Bligh, to the origin of your charming wife—need it on the glandular level. *Every* show we can produce is important. But the Field Day—"

His thick brows came down like the ragged anvils of thunderclouds. "The Field Day, you tin-eared fumbler, is the biggest day of the year! *Not* just because it draws the biggest audience—but because that's the one *I* am judged by! The Board attends. The Mayor attends. The men from G-M-L attend. If they like it, good. If they don't—that's *my* neck on the line, Bligh!"

Norvell opened his mouth.

"Not a word! I want no excuses. Your notion of what constituted a Field Day was, of course, uninspired. But I thought that, with patching and improvising, we might get by. I no longer think so—not since examining the superb presentation that was handed me this morning—by a member of your own staff, Bligh! A brilliant boy whom you have evidently been holding down. Thank God he had the courage and sense to come to *me* with this masterpiece instead of permitting you to destroy it!"

Norvell was able to croak, "Who?"

"Stimmens."

Stimmens? Wet behind the ears, untried, simple research? Who didn't even want to stay with the firm, who had the infernal gall to ask for a contract release? *Stimmens?*

NORVELL'S hand stretched out for the punched cards and then he stopped,

"Go ahead," Candella said coldly.

Bligh scanned them in aston-

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ishment. Why, he thought, this is impossible—and this bit here, we can't—

"Mind if I play these, Mr. Candella?" he asked and, getting an ironic nod, fed the punch cards into Candella's machine. The circuits scanned the punches and built a scene of electronic slaughter for him. He watched the little fire-figures in growing apprehension.

When he looked up, he said, so bemused that he hardly remembered to be fearful, "Why, it's good!"

"Of course it's good!"

"*Really* good, Mr. Candella." He shook his head wonderingly. "Stimmens, eh? I never would have believed it. Of course, the emotional values need bringing out. The comedy stuff with the vitriol pistols ought to follow a tense thriller like Man Versus Scorpions, instead of another comedy number like the Octogenarians with Flame-throwers. But that's easy enough to fix. Race against Manmade Lightning is out, too. Stimmens told me himself we couldn't get the equipment from Schenectady. I suppose he forgot."

Candella was looking at him with an indescribable expression, but Norvell raced on. "Real originality, Mr. Candella. I—I must say I admire him. Piranhas in the aquatic meet—wonderful! And the octogenarians are a terrific switch. Number after number I've never heard of! I have to admit it, Mr. Candella, that boy has talent."

"What the hell are you babbling about?"

"Why, the—the *originality,* Mr. Candella. The *freshness.*"

"Originality! Bligh, do you think I'm crazy enough to run untried novelties in a show like this? *Every one* of these features has been a smash success somewhere in the country within the last ninety days."

"Oh, no! I've been getting all the reports and none of this stuff —Stimmens was doing the research himself. He ought to know!"

CANDELLA exploded. "Look, you fool!" He tossed a sheaf of reports at Norvell.

They were all there—names, dates, places. Norvell looked up in horror. "It's a doublecross! He wants a Fifteen rating. Just yesterday, he tried to get me to recommend remission of his contract. I wouldn't do it. This is his way of getting even."

"Bligh, that's a serious charge!"

"Oh, I'll prove it, Mr. Candella. I've got the copies of his reports locked in my desk."

Candella stood up. "Show me," he ordered.

Ten minutes later, he was say-

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ing grimly, "Thought I wouldn't call your bluff, eh?"

Norvell stared unbelievingly at the reports, face white as a sheet. They had been in his desk, locked with his key. And they were not the reports he had seen. They sparkled with novelties—all the magnificent new concepts in Stimmens' outline and more, much more.

How? He couldn't have left the desk unlocked. Nobody had a key but him and Miss Dali—and she had no reason to do such a thing. Had he gone mad? Was it some chemical prank, the reports he saw in disappearing ink, the substituted ones then coming to light? *How?*

Over Norvell's desk set, Candella was calling Stimmens in. The boy appeared, looking awed and deferential.

Mr. Candella said briefly, "Congratulations, Stimmens. You're the head of the department as of now. Move into your office whenever you like—*this* is your office. And throw this bum out." To Norvell: "Your contract is canceled *for cause*. Don't ever try to get a job in this line again; you'll waste your time." He left without another word.

Stimmens said uneasily, "I didn't have the heart to go through with it. I had to give you a chance—you turned it down."

Norvell just stared.

Stimmens went on defensively, "It isn't as if I just walked into it. Believe me, I earned this. What do I know about Field Days? Sweat, sweat, sweat—I haven't had a moment's peace."

Miss Dali walked in and kissed Stimmens, burbling, "Darling, I just heard! You wonderful Grade Fifteen, you!"

"Oh," said Norvell in a sick voice.

They said more, but he didn't hear. It was as if his hearing aid were turned off, though, in this instance, the switch was not in his pocket, but in his mind. He was out on the street before he realized what he was doing—and what had happened to the contract career of Norvell Bligh.

NORVELL came up to the problem of Virginia in his thinking and, like a thousand times before, he backed away from it. He ordered another drink.

No contract status meant no bubble house. It also meant Belly Rave. Norvell took a deep swallow. Still, what was so bad about Belly Rave? The allotments would take care of eating. His extra work—whatever it turned out to be—would give him a chance to save a little money, make a fresh start, maybe get back on contract and into

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a bubble house again. After all, he was a trained man—an Engineer, in a way.

He wished once again that he knew a little more about Belly Rave. Funny, considering that Virginia had been born there. But she had never wanted to talk about it.

And there he was, back on the subject of Virginia.

How would she take it? He really couldn't guess. She had been so resolutely silent on the subject of Belly Rave and all it concerned. Her childhood, her parents, even her husband—the power-cycle stunter whose crash in a long-ago Field Day had left young Norvell Bligh with a tearless widow to jolly out of filing a claim. He had married her instead and Candella had made an unforgivable joke . . . No, he hadn't married her—*she* had married, not Norvell Bligh, but a contract job and a G-M-L house.

He dialed another drink. Well, there was still Arnie. He wasn't the kind of friend to look the other way when you were a little down on your luck—not even that, really, just temporarily the victim of a professional misunderstanding and a doublecross. Good old Arnie, Norvell thought sentimentally.

He caught a glimpse of the time. Maybe he ought to have it out with Virginia, and then go over and spend some time with Arnie. The thought braced him.

He swallowed his drink and slipped his wallet into the bar slot. Having it out with Virginia might not be so tough at that. The fact that she had been born in Belly Rave was an advantage, if he could only make her see it that way. She'd have friends there. She'd have some ideas about pleasant, useful work he could do to supplement the allotment until he got on his feet again—

Something crushed his shoulder and spun him around. "Whaddya think you're up to?" the policeman demanded. He shook the wallet under Norvell Bligh's nose. "You know the penalty for passing a bum penalty card? You Belly Ravers are all alike—find a lapsed card and a front and try to get a free load. Come along. The Captain wants to talk to you."

BLIGH spent a long time trying to make them believe him down at the precinct, before he realized they did believe him—believed him and just didn't care.

It was close to dinner time and they put him in something they called "the Tank" until the desk sergeant got back from his meal. Norvell didn't like the

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tank and he didn't like the looks of the half-dozen other persons who occupied it with him.

Still, it was only a question of his lapsed credit card—they could easily have added drunk and disorderly to the charge—or even no visible means of support, which meant getting a job instantly or being jugged for quite a while. And there was only one kind of job a man in police trouble could pick up a phone and get, every time. Usually you didn't have to phone. The cops would drive you down to the Stadium's service entrance themselves. Norvell knew the process, having seen enough "volunteers" delivered.

"Hey, Bligh."

Norvell said, "Yes, sir?"

The cop opened the door. "This way." They came to a dingy room. There was an embarrassing process of holding your hands over your head while someone searched you. You couldn't blame them, Norvell told himself; they must have had plenty of desperate criminals here. There was a curiously interesting process of inking the fingers and rolling them across a piece of paper. There was a mildly painful process of looking into what seemed to be a binocular microscope; a light flashed, and Norvell had a little trouble seeing.

While Norvell was blinking at the halo in his field of vision, the cop said something. Norvell said, "What?"

"I said do you want to call your lawyer?"

Norvell shook his head automatically. Then he remembered—he *had* a lawyer. "Why, yes," he said. He found Mundin's phone number in the book with some difficulty. It was after hours, but he was lucky enough to get an answer—though Mundin himself wasn't there and the person who answered seemed to be drunk or something. But Norvell left a message, and then there was nothing to do but wait.

Curiously, the waiting was not unpleasant. Even the thought of what Virginia would say or do about this was not particularly terrifying. What worse could happen than had already?

VII

"THANK you very much, Mr. Mundin," Norvell said. He looked back at the precinct house and shuddered.

Mundin said, "Don't thank me. I just put in a word with Del Dworcas and he put in a word with the precinct. Thank him."

Norvell brightened. "Oh, I intend to! I've wanted to meet Mr. Dworcas for a long time.

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His brother Arnie is a very close friend of mine."

Mundin shrugged. "Come on, then. I'm going to the Hall anyhow."

Mundin stalked sourly ahead of his client, his mind on G-M-L Homes. The hope kept hammering at his good sense—*maybe* he could pull it off. Maybe . . .

Norvell followed contentedly enough through the rain. Everything was being ordered for him. He was out of a job, he had been *in jail,* he was hours and hours late for Virginia without a word of explanation—but none of it had been his own decision.

Decisions would come later. That would be the hard part.

Norvell stared around the Hall curiously. It wasn't as impressive as one might expect—though maybe, he thought, you had to admire the Regular Republicans for their common touch. There was certainly nothing showy about the place.

Norvell stopped, politely out of earshot, as Mundin spoke to a dark, sharp-featured man in shirt sleeves. Some kind of janitor, he guessed. He was astonished when Mundin called him over and introduced the man as Del Dworcas.

Norvell said, "I'm really delighted to meet you, Mr. Dworcas. Your brother Arnie is very proud of you. He and I are very good friends."

Dworcas asked irrelevantly, "Live around here?"

"Oh, no. Quite some distance away, but—"

Dworcas seemed to lose interest. "Glad to meet you. You want to see Arnie, he's in Hussein's, across the street. Now, Charles, what was it you wanted to see me about?"

Norvell was left standing with his hand extended. He blinked a little, but—after all, he reminded himself, Mr. Dworcas was a busy man.

On the way downstairs, he caught a glimpse of the time. It was after eleven!

ARNIE was at a table by himself reading. He looked up as Norvell came close and hastily put the magazine away.

Norvell smiled and slipped into a vacant seat. "Surprised to see me?"

Arnie frowned. "What are you doing here?"

Norvell lost his smile. "Can—can I have some coffee, Arnie? I came out without any money." Arnie looked mildly outraged, but beckoned the grinning waiter.

Then Norvell told him—about the jail, and Mundin, and Del Dworcas.

"You've had a busy day," Arnie said humorously. "I'm glad

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you met Del, though—he's a prince. Incidentally, I've taken the liberty of asking a couple of associates to the Field Day. So when you get the tickets—"

"Arnie—"

"When you get the tickets, will you pick up three extras?"

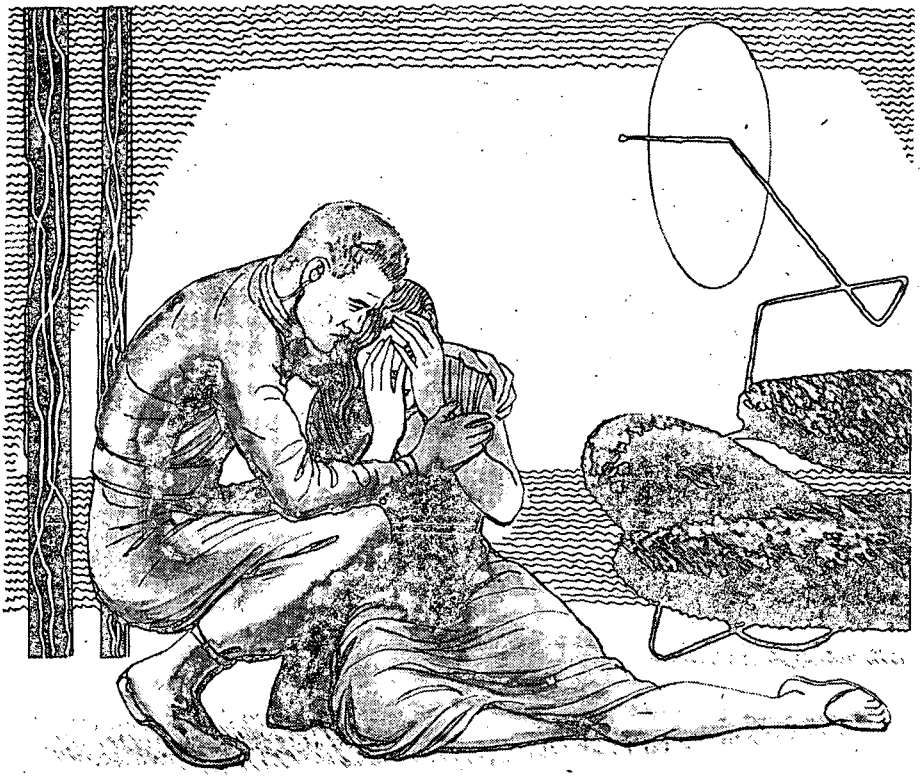
"Arnie, listen to me. I *can't* get the tickets."

"You *what?*"

"I got fired today. That's why I didn't have any money."

There was a pause. Dworcas began looking through his pockets for a cigarette. He found the pack and put it absently on the table in front of him without lighting one. He said nothing.

Norvell said apologetically, "It wasn't my fault, Arnie. This rat Stimmens—" He told what had happened at the office, concluding, "It's going to be all right, Arnie. Don't worry about me. It's like you said—maybe I



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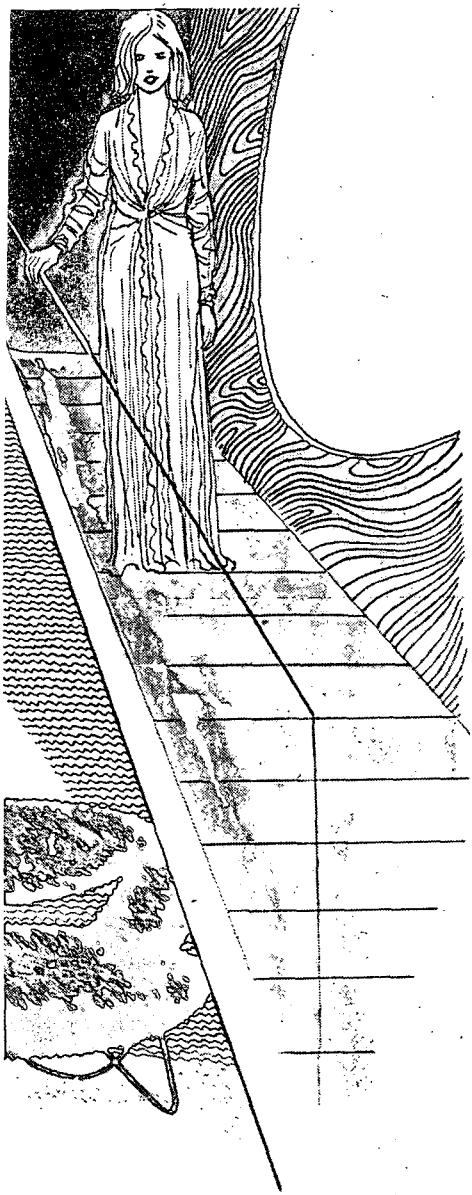

should have canceled long ago. I'll make a fresh start in Belly Rave. Virginia can help me; she knows her way around there. We'll find some place that isn't *too* bad, you know, and get it fixed up. Some of those old houses are pretty interesting. And it's only a question of time until—"

"I see. You've taken an important step, Norvell. Naturally, I wish you the best of luck."

"Thanks, Arnie," Norvell said eagerly. "I don't think it'll be so bad. I—"

"Of course," Arnie went on meditatively, "it does put *me* in kind of a spot."

"You, Arnie?" Norvell cried, aghast.

DWORCAS shrugged. "It doesn't matter, I suppose. It's just that the fellows at the shop warned me that you were probably stringing me along about the tickets. I don't know what I'll tell them that won't make you look pretty bad, Norvell."

Norvell squeezed his eyes shut. Loyal Arnie! Concerned about *his* status in the eyes of the other engineers!

"Well, that's the way the ball bounces, Norvell," Arnie went on. "I can't blame you for putting your own problems first." He looked ostentatiously at his watch. "I'd better be getting back

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to the Hall. My brother has something he wants to consult with me about." He dropped a bill on the table and piloted Norvell to the door.

Under the dingy marquee, he patted Norvell's shoulder. "Drop me a line once in a while, won't you?" he urged. "I'm the world's worst letter-writer, but I'll always be glad to hear how you're getting along."

Norvell stopped. "Write you a letter, Arnie? I'll be seeing you, won't I?"

"Of course you will." Dworcas frowned at the rain. He said patiently, "It's just that you naturally won't want to make that trip from Belly Rave too often. For that matter, I'll be kind of tied up evenings myself until I get this thing for my brother over with . . . Look, Norvell, no sense standing here. Drop me a line when you get a chance. And the *best* of luck, fellow!"

Norvell nodded blankly and walked into the rain. With his credit card canceled and no cash-money in his pockets, it was a long, wet way home. After the second block, he thought of going back and borrowing cab fare from Arnie.

He decided not to.

He needed plenty of time to rehearse what he was going to say to Virginia.

FORTUNATELY, Virginia's daughter was asleep. Norvell changed his sopping clothes without a word to his wife, came down, looked her in the eye *and* told her—directly and brutally.

Then he waited for the explosion. Virginia sat there, blank-faced, and ran her fingers caressingly over the soft arms of the chair. She rose and wandered to the wall patterner. Typical of her sloppy housework, the morning-cheer pattern was still on. With gentle fingers, she reset the wall to a glowing old rose and dimmed the lights to a romantic, intimate amber. She drifted to a wall and mirrorized it, looking long at herself.

Norvell looked, too. Under the flattering lights, her skin was gold-touched and flawless, the harsh scowl lines magicked away.

She sat on the warm, textured floor and began to sob.

Norvell found himself squatting awkwardly beside her. "Please, honey. Please don't cry."

She didn't stop. But she didn't push him away. He was cradling her uncomfortably in his arms, talking to her in a way he had never been able to before. Being without contract status would be hard, of course, but weren't thousands of people standing it right now? Maybe things had been physically too easy for them, maybe it took pressure to

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weld two personalities together, maybe their marriage would turn into shared toil and shared happiness and . . .

Alexandra giggled from the head of the stairs.

Norvell sat straight up. The girl tittered, "Well, excuse *me!* I didn't dream there was anything *intimate* going on."

Virginia got quickly to her feet.

He swallowed and made the effort. "Sandy," he said gently, using her almost-forgotten pet name, "please come down. I have something to tell you."

Virginia stood tensely. Norvell knew she was trying and loved her for it.

THE girl came down the stairs, her much too sophisticated dressing gown fastened with a careless pin.

Norvell began firmly, "Sandy—"

Alexandra's face was ancient and haughty. "*Please,*" she interrupted him. "You *know* how I feel about that *humiliating* nickname."

"I didn't mean—"

"Of *course* you didn't mean *anything.* You didn't *mean* to wake me up with your drunken *performance* on the stairs, did you? You didn't *mean* to keep Virginia and me in *terror* when you didn't *bother* to let us know you'd be out late." She shot a sly glance at her mother, fishing for approbation.

Virginia's hands were clenched in a tight knot.

Norvell said hopelessly, "I only wanted to tell you something."

"*Nothing* you can say *now* would help."

"No?" Norvell yelled at her, restraint gone. "Well, listen anyway, damn it! We're going to Belly Rave! All of us—tomorrow! Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Virginia said at last, with a wiry edge to her voice, "You don't have to shout at the poor child."

That was the ball game. He knew perfectly well she had meant nothing of the kind, but his glands answered for him. "So I don't have to shout at her—because she isn't deaf like me, is that it? My loyal wife! My loving family!"

"I didn't mean that!" Virginia cried.

"You never do!" Norvell bellowed over Alexandra's shrill contribution.

Virginia screamed, "You *know* I didn't mean it, but I wish I had! You call yourself a husband! You can't even take care of a family!"

It went on and on almost until dawn.

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VIII

CHARLES Mundin said, "Thanks for springing Bligh, Del."

Dworcas answered affably, "Hell, any time. Besides, he's a friend of Arnie's. Now what's on your mind?"

"G-M-L Homes. Del, I think you've put me onto something. If it works out—well, I won't forget."

"Sure, Charles. Look, it's getting late and I've got a couple of things to do."

"I'll make it quick. This election, Del—let me out of it, will you? I mean I'll take my licking at the polls and all that, but I want to get right on this G-M-L thing, not spend my time on a sound truck or waiting for a broadcast that never happens. Besides—honestly, Del, I can't afford it. I'm busted."

"What's the matter, Charles? The going getting rough?"

Mundin said stubbornly, "You don't give a damn whether I run or not and you know it. I've got no hard feelings. Just let me off the hook."

Dworcas made his decision. He grinned. "Why should I get in your way? Hop on this deal if it looks so good. I'm not saying it won't leave me short-handed—I've even got Arnie helping out, though God knows he won't be good for much. So you think this G-M-L deal is actually on the level?"

Charles opened his mouth to answer, but one of Dworcas' handymen stuck his head in the door.

He whispered to Del.

Dworcas apologized, "Sorry, Charles, but Jimmy Baker is here. Excuse me a minute."

It really wasn't much more than a minute, even though, when Dworcas came back, he was walking slowly and he didn't look at Mundin. "What was I asking? Oh, yeah—if you think the G-M-L deal is actually on the level."

"Yes, I do. At any rate, I'm going to give it a whirl."

"Wonder if you're doing the right thing."

Mundin was startled. "How do you mean?"

Dworcas shrugged. "It's a pretty serious business, practicing a kind of law you aren't trained for. It's *your* affair, though. I just don't want to see you getting into trouble."

"Wait a minute! What's this about? It was your idea, wasn't it?"

Dworcas said coldly, "Worried, Mundin? Trying to hang it on me?" He picked up his phone in a gesture of dismissal. "Take off, will you? I've got work to do."

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IT bothered Mundin all the way home, and it bothered him the next morning when he woke up.

It bothered him even more at the County Courthouse. He walked in with a nod to the duty cop and the cop looked right through him. He said to the assistant clerk at the counter, "What do you say, Abe? How are the kids?" And the clerk mumbled something and closed his window with a bang.

By then, Mundin began to catch on. He got sore and he got determined. He waited in line at the next window and asked for the records he wanted. He sent back the wrong folder they gave him first. He pointed out that half the papers were missing from the right folder when he got it. He sat in the County Clerk's waiting room for two hours, until the secretary wandered in and said, with aggrieved hostility, "Mr. Cochrane has gone to lunch. He won't be back today."

He wrote out a formal complaint on the sheet of paper she grudgingly gave him, alleging that he was being illegally and improperly hampered in his attempt to examine the corporate public-records files of G-M-L Homes, Inc., and he doggedly left it with her, knowing what would happen to the paper as soon as he got out of the door.

It fluttered into the wastebasket *before* he got out of the door and he turned angrily to object.

The duty cop was standing right beside him, looking eager.

Mundin went back to his office to think things over.

Fourteen billion dollars . . .

BUT how the devil did they know so fast? Not from Dworcas, Mundin told himself. He could swear that Del hadn't known the heat was on until Jimmy Baker had called him out of the room. And Dworcas had sent Mundin there in the first place. Because—Mundin flushed angrily at the thought, almost certain that it was right—because Dworcas was pretty sure that a two-bit ambulance chaser like himself wouldn't do them any good? Then what had changed his mind?

Mundin kicked the Sleepless Secretary and went on pacing. In bell-like tones, the Secretary told him that Mrs. Mundin would remit the full balance due by Friday.

He sat down at the desk. All right, so the going was going to be tough. That figured. What else could you expect? And the harder G-M-L Homes made it, the more scared they were—

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didn't that figure, too? And the more scared they were, the more chance that this whole impossible thing was on the level, that Charles Mundin, Ll.B., stood on the threshold of corporate law.

He took out a piece of paper and began to figure. They could make it rough, but they couldn't stop him. He could get court orders to see the records. That was the obvious starting place, if only to make sure for himself that the Lavins were on the level. As long as Norma Lavin was willing to call him her attorney-in-fact, they couldn't keep him out.

There would be a slowdown in court, naturally, but it couldn't take more than a couple of days. Meanwhile, he could get started on some of the other angles. Don's conditioning—there might be a criminal charge in that somewhere, if he could manage to get names, dates and places.

He reached for his model-forms book and began drafting a power of attorney for Norma Lavin to sign. She'd sign it, of course—she was an independent and difficult person, but she didn't have much choice. Besides, he thought absently, a lot of that hardness was undoubtedly protective armor. In circumstances like hers, what could you expect?

The phone rang. He cut out the Sleepless Secretary hastily and picked up the receiver. "Mundin," he said.

The voice was ancient and utterly lost. "This is Harry Ryan," it quavered. "Better come out here, Mundin. I think they've snatched Norma!"

—FREDERIK POHL
& C. M. KORNBLUTH

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Wishes are free, aren't they?

Devil they are! Not very many

people are ever able to get—

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

BUT had he heard a voice? He couldn't be sure. Reconstructing it a moment later, Joe Collins knew he had been lying on his bed, too tired even to take his waterlogged shoes off the blanket. He had been staring at the network of cracks in the muddy yellow ceiling, watching water drip slowly and mournfully through.

It must have happened then. Collins caught a glimpse of metal beside his bed. He sat up. There was a machine on the floor, where no machine had been.

In that first moment of surprise, Collins thought he heard a very distant voice say, "There! *That* does it!"

He couldn't be sure of the voice. But the machine was undeniably there.

Collins knelt to examine it. The machine was about three feet square and it was humming softly. The crackle-gray surface was featureless, except for a red button in one corner and a brass plate in the center. The plate

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said, CLASS-A UTILIZER, SERIES AA-1256432. And underneath, WARNING! THIS MACHINE SHOULD BE USED ONLY BY CLASS-A RATINGS!

That was all.

THERE were no knobs, dials, switches or any of the other attachments Collins associated with machines. Just the brass plate, the red button and the hum.

"Where did you come from?" Collins asked. The Class-A Utilizer continued to hum. He hadn't really expected an answer. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he stared thoughtfully at the Utilizer. The question now was—what to do with it?

He touched the red button warily, aware of his lack of experience with machines that fell from nowhere. When he turned it on, would the floor open up? Would little green men drop from the ceiling?

But he had slightly less than nothing to lose. He pressed the button lightly.

Nothing happened.

"All right—*do* something," Collins said, feeling definitely let down. The Utilizer only continued to hum softly.

Well, he could always pawn it. Honest Charlie would give him at least a dollar for the metal. He tried to lift the Utilizer. It wouldn't lift. He tried again, exerting all his strength, and succeeded in raising one corner an inch from the floor. He released it and sat down on the bed, breathing heavily.

"You should have sent a couple of men to help me," Collins told the Utilizer. Immediately, the hum grew louder and the machine started to vibrate.

Collins watched, but still nothing happened. On a hunch, he reached out and stabbed the red button.

Immediately, two bulky men appeared, dressed in rough workclothes. They looked at the Utilizer appraisingly. One of them said, "Thank God, it's the small model. The big ones is brutes to get a grip on."

The other man said, "It beats the marble quarry, don't it?"

They looked at Collins, who stared back. Finally the first man said, "Okay, Mac, we ain't got all day. Where you want it?"

"Who are you?" Collins managed to croak.

"The moving men. Do we look like the Vanizaggi Sisters?"

"But where do you come from?" Collins asked. "And *why?*"

"We come from the Powha Minnile Movers, Incorporated," the man said. "And we come because you wanted movers, that's

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why. Now, where you want it?"

"Go away," Collins said. "I'll call for you later."

The moving men shrugged their shoulders and vanished. For several minutes, Collins stared at the spot where they had been. Then he stared at the Class-A Utilizer, which was humming softly again.

Utilizer? He could give it a better name.

A Wishing Machine.

Collins was not particularly shocked. When the miraculous occurs, only dull, workaday mentalities are unable to accept it. Collins was certainly not one of those. He had an excellent background for acceptance.

MOST of his life had been spent wishing, hoping, praying that something marvelous would happen to him. In high school, he had dreamed of waking up some morning with an ability to know his homework without the tedious necessity of studying it. In the army, he had wished for some witch or jinn to change his orders, putting him in charge of the Day Room, instead of forcing him to do close-order drill like everyone else.

Out of the army, Collins had avoided work, for which he was psychologically unsuited. He had drifted around, hoping that some fabulously wealthy person would be induced to change his will, leaving him Everything.

He had never really expected anything to happen. But he was prepared when it did.

"I'd like a thousand dollars in small unmarked bills," Collins said cautiously. When the hum grew louder, he pressed the button. In front of him appeared a large mound of soiled singles, five and ten dollar bills. They were not crisp, but they certainly were money.

Collins threw a handful in the air and watched it settle beautifully to the floor. He lay on his bed and began making plans.

First, he would get the machine out of New York—upstate, perhaps — some place where he wouldn't be bothered by nosy neighbors. The income tax would be tricky on this sort of thing. Perhaps, after he got organized, he should go to Central America, or . . .

There was a suspicious noise in the room.

Collins leaped to his feet. A hole was opening in the wall, and someone was forcing his way through.

"*Hey,* I didn't ask you anything!" Collins told the machine.

The hole grew larger, and a large, red-faced man was halfway through, pushing angrily at the hole.

At that moment, Collins re-

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membered that machines usually have owners. Anyone who owned a wishing machine wouldn't take kindly to having it gone. He would go to any lengths to recover it. Probably, he wouldn't stop short of—

"Protect me!" Collins shouted at the Utilizer, and stabbed the red button.

A SMALL, bald man in loud pajamas appeared, yawning sleepily. "Sanisa Leek, Temporal Wall Protection Service," he said, rubbing his eyes. "I'm Leek. What can I do for you?"

"Get him out of here!" Collins screamed. The red-faced man, waving his arms wildly, was almost through the hole.

Leek found a bit of bright metal in his pajamas pocket. The red-faced man shouted, "Wait! You don't understand! That man—"

Leek pointed his piece of metal. The red-faced man screamed and vanished. In another moment the hole had vanished too.

"Did you kill him?" Collins asked.

"Of course not," Leek said, putting away the bit of metal. "I just veered him back through his glommatch. He won't try *that* way again."

"You mean he'll try some other way?" Collins asked.

"It's possible," Leek said. "He could attempt a micro-transfer, or even an animation." He looked sharply at Collins. "This is your Utilizer, isn't it?"

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"Of course," Collins said, starting to perspire.

"And you're an A-rating?"

"Naturally," Collins told him. "If I wasn't, what would I be doing with a Utilizer?"

"No offense," Leek said drowsily, "just being friendly." He

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shook his head slowly. "How you As get around! I suppose you've come back here to do a history book?"

Collins just smiled enigmatically.

"I'll be on my way," Leek said, yawning copiously. "On the go, night and day. I'd be better off in a quarry."

And he vanished in the middle of a yawn.

Rain was still beating against the ceiling. Across the airshaft, the snoring continued, undisturbed. Collins was alone again, with the machine.

And with a thousand dollars in small bills scattered around the floor.

He patted the Utilizer affectionately. Those A-ratings had it pretty good. Want something? Just ask for it and press a button. Undoubtedly, the real owner missed it.

Leek had said that the man might try to get in some other way. What way?

What did it matter? Collins gathered up the bills, whistling softly. As long as he had the wishing machine, he could take care of himself.

THE next few days marked a great change in Collins' fortunes. With the aid of the Powha Minnile Movers he took the Utilizer to upstate New York. There, he bought a medium-sized mountain in a neglected corner of the Adirondacks. Once the papers were in his hands, he walked to the center of his property, several miles from the highway. The two movers, sweating profusely, lugged the Utilizer behind him, cursing monotonously as they broke through the dense underbrush.

"Set it down here and scram," Collins said. The last few days had done a lot for his confidence.

The moving men sighed wearily and vanished. Collins looked around. On all sides, as far as he could see, was closely spaced forest of birch and pine. The air was sweet and damp. Birds were chirping merrily in the treetops, and an occasional squirrel darted by.

Nature! He had always loved nature. This would be the perfect spot to build a large, impressive house with swimming pool, tennis courts and, possibly, a small airport.

"I want a house," Collins stated firmly, and pushed the red button.

A man in a neat gray business suit and pince-nez appeared. "Yes, sir," he said, squinting at the trees, "but you really must be more specific. Do you want something classic, like a bungalow, ranch, split-level, mansion, castle or palace? Or primitive,

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like an igloo or hut? Since you are an A, you could have something up-to-the-minute, like a semi-face, an Extended New or a Sunken Miniature."

"Huh?" Collins said. "I don't know. What would you suggest?"

"Small mansion," the man said promptly. "They usually start with that."

"They do?"

"Oh, yes. Later, they move to a warm climate and build a palace."

Collins wanted to ask more questions, but he decided against it. Everything was going smoothly. These people thought he was an A, and the true owner of the Utilizer. There was no sense in disenchanting them.

"You take care of it all," he told the man.

"Yes, sir," the man said. "I usually do."

The rest of the day, Collins reclined on a couch and drank iced beverages while the Maxima Olph Construction Company materialized equipment and put up his house.

It was a low-slung affair of some twenty rooms, which Collins considered quite modest under the circumstances. It was built only of the best materials, from a design of Mig of Degma, interior by Towige, a Mula swimming pool and formal gardens by Vierien.

By evening, it was completed, and the small army of workmen packed up their equipment and vanished.

COLLINS allowed his chef to prepare a light supper for him. Afterward, he sat in his large, cool living room to think the whole thing over. In front of him, humming gently, sat the Utilizer.

Collins lighted a cheroot and sniffed the aroma. First of all, he rejected any supernatural explanations. There were no demons or devils involved in this. His house had been built by ordinary human beings, who swore and laughed and cursed like human beings. The Utilizer was simply a scientific gadget, which worked on principles he didn't understand or care to understand.

Could it have come from another planet? Not likely. They wouldn't have learned English just for him.

The Utilizer must have come from the Earth's future. But how?

Collins leaned back and puffed his cheroot. Accidents will happen, he reminded himself. Why couldn't the Utilizer have just *slipped* into the past? After all, it could create something from nothing, and that was much more complicated.

What a wonderful future it

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must be, he thought. Wishing machines! How marvelously civilized! All a person had to do was think of something. Presto! There it was. In time, perhaps, they'd eliminate the red button. Then there'd be no manual labor involved.

Of course, he'd have to watch his step. There was still the owner—and the rest of the As. They would try to take the machine from him. Probably, they were a hereditary clique . . .

A movement caught the edge of his eye and he looked up. The Utilizer was quivering like a leaf in a gale.

Collins walked up to it, frowning blackly. A faint mist of steam surrounded the trembling Utilizer. It seemed to be overheating.

Could he have overworked it? Perhaps a bucket of water . . .

Then he noticed that the Utilizer was perceptibly smaller. It was no more than two feet square and shrinking before his eyes.

The owner! Or perhaps the As! This must be the microtransfer that Leek had talked about. If he didn't do something quickly, Collins knew, his wishing machine would dwindle to nothingness and disappear.

"Leek Protection Service," Collins snapped. He punched the button and withdrew his hand quickly. The machine was very hot.

Leek appeared in a corner of the room, wearing slacks and a sports shirt, and carrying a golf club. "Must I be disturbed every time I—"

"*Do something!*" Collins shouted, pointing to the Utilizer, which was now only a foot square and glowing a dull red.

"Nothing I can do," Leek said. "Temporal wall is all I'm licensed for. You want the microcontrol people." He hefted his golf club and was gone.

"MICROCONTROL," Collins said, and reached for the button. He withdrew his hand hastily. The Utilizer was only about four inches on a side now and glowing a hot cherry red. He could barely see the button, which was the size of a pin.

Collins whirled around, grabbed a cushion and punched down.

A girl with horn-rimmed glasses appeared, notebook in hand, pencil poised. "With whom did you wish to make an appointment?" she asked sedately.

"Get me help fast!" Collins roared, watching his precious Utilizer grow smaller and smaller.

"Mr. Vergon is out to lunch," the girl said, biting her pencil thoughtfully. "He's de-zoned himself. I can't reach him."

"Who *can* you reach?"

She consulted her notebook. "Mr. Vis is in the Dieg Continu-

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um and Mr. Elgis is doing field work in Paleolithic Europe. If you're really in a rush, maybe you'd better call Transferpoint Control. They're a smaller outfit, but—"

"Transferpoint Control. Okay —scram." He turned his full attention to the Utilizer and stabbed down on it with the scorched pillow. Nothing happened. The Utilizer was barely half an inch square, and Collins realized that the cushion hadn't been able to depress the almost invisible button.

For a moment Collins considered letting the Utilizer go. Maybe this was the time. He could sell the house, the furnishings, and still be pretty well off . . .

No! He hadn't wished for anything important yet! No one was going to take it from him without a struggle.

He forced himself to keep his eyes open as he stabbed the white-hot button with a rigid forefinger.

A thin, shabbily dressed old man appeared, holding something that looked like a gaily colored Easter egg. He threw it down. The egg burst and an orange smoke billowed out and was sucked directly into the infinitesimal Utilizer. A great billow of smoke went up, almost choking Collins. Then the Utilizer's shape started to form again. Soon, it was normal size and apparently undamaged. The old man nodded curtly.

"We're not fancy," he said, "but we're reliable." He nodded again and disappeared.

Collins thought he could hear a distant shout of anger.

Shakily, he sat down on the floor in front of the machine. His hand was throbbing painfully.

"Fix me up," he muttered through dry lips, and punched the button with his good hand.

The Utilizer hummed louder for a moment, then was silent. The pain left his scorched finger and, looking down, Collins saw that there was no sign of a burn —not even scar tissue to mark where it had been.

Collins poured himself a long shot of brandy and went directly to bed. That night, he dreamed he was being chased by a gigantic letter A, but he didn't remember it in the morning.

WITHIN a week, Collins found that building his mansion in the woods had been precisely the wrong thing to do. He had to hire a platoon of guards to keep away sightseers, and hunters insisted on camping in his formal gardens.

Also, the Bureau of Internal Revenue began to take a lively interest in his affairs.

But, above all, Collins discov-

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ered he wasn't so fond of Nature after all. Birds and squirrels were all very well, but they hardly ranked as conversationalists. Trees, though quite ornamental, made poor drinking companions.

Collins decided he was a city boy at heart.

Therefore, with the aid of the Powha Minnile Movers, the Maxima Alph Construction Corporation, the Jagton Instantaneous Travel Bureau and a great deal of money placed in the proper hands, Collins moved to a small Central American republic. There, since the climate was warmer and Income Tax non-existent, he built a large, airy, ostentatious palace.

It came equipped with the usual accessories — horses, dogs, peacocks, servants, maintenance men, guards, musicians, bevies of dancing girls and everything else a palace should have. Collins spent two weeks just exploring the place.

Everything went along nicely for a while.

One morning Collins approached the Utilizer, with the vague intention of asking for a sports-car, or possibly a small herd of pedigreed cattle. He bent over the gray machine, reached for the red button . . .

And the Utilizer backed away from him.

For a moment, Collins thought he was seeing things, and he almost decided to stop drinking champagne before breakfast. He took a step forward and reached for the red button.

The Utilizer sidestepped him neatly and trotted out of the room.

COLLINS sprinted after it, cursing the owner and the As. This was probably the animation that Leek had spoken about—somehow, the owner had managed to imbue the machine with mobility. It didn't matter. All he had to do was catch up, punch the button and ask for the Animation Control people.

The Utilizer raced down a hall, Collins close behind. An under-butler, polishing a solid gold doorknob, stared open-mouthed.

"Stop it!" Collins shouted.

The under-butler moved clumsily into the Utilizer's path. The machine dodged him gracefully and sprinted toward the main door.

Collins pushed a switch and the door slammed shut.

The Utilizer gathered momentum and went right through it. Once in the open, it tripped over a garden hose, regained its balance and headed toward the open countryside.

Collins raced after it. If he could get just a little closer . . .

The Utilizer suddenly leaped

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into the air. It hung there for a long moment, then fell to the ground. Collins sprang at the button.

The Utilizer rolled out of his way, took a short run and leaped again. For a moment, it hung twenty feet above his head—drifted a few feet straight up, stopped, twisted wildly and fell.

Collins was afraid that, on a third jump, it would keep going up. When it drifted unwillingly back to the ground, he was ready. He feinted, then stabbed at the button. The Utilizer couldn't duck fast enough.

"Animation Control!" Collins roared triumphantly.

There was a small explosion, and the Utilizer settled down docilely. There was no hint of animation left in it.

Collins wiped his forehead and sat on the machine. Closer and closer. He'd better do some big wishing now, while he still had the chance.

In rapid succession, he asked for five million dollars, three fuctioning oil wells, a motion-picture studio, perfect health, twenty-five more dancing girls, immortality, a sports-car and a herd of pedigreed cattle.

He thought he heard someone snicker. He looked around. No one was there.

When he turned back, the Utilizer had vanished.

He just stared. And, in another moment, *he* vanished.

WHEN he opened his eyes, Collins found himself standing in front of a desk. On the other side was the large, red-faced man who had originally tried to break into his room The man didn't appear angry. Rather, he appeared resigned, even melancholy.

Collins stood for a moment in silence, sorry that the whole thing was over. The owner and the As had finally caught him. But it had been glorious while it lasted.

"Well," Collins said directly, "you've got your machine back. Now, what else do you want?"

"*My* machine?" the red-faced man said, looking up incredulously. "It's not my machine, sir. Not at all."

Collins stared at him. "Don't try to kid me, mister. You A-ratings want to protect your monopoly, don't you?"

The red-faced man put down his paper. "Mr. Collins," he said stiffly, "my name is Flign. I am an agent for the Citizens Protective Union, a non-profit organization, whose aim is to protect individuals such as yourself from errors of judgment."

"You mean you're not one of the As?"

"You are laboring under a

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misapprehension, sir," Flign said with quiet dignity. "The A-rating does not represent a social group, as you seem to believe. It is merely a credit rating."

"A what?" Collins asked slowly.

"A credit rating." Flign glanced at his watch. "We haven't much time, so I'll make this as brief as possible. Ours is a decentralized age, Mr. Collins. Our businesses, industries and services are scattered through an appreciable portion of space and time. The utilization corporation is an essential link. It provides for the transfer of goods and services from point to point. Do you understand?"

Collins nodded.

"Credit is, of course, an automatic privilege. But, eventually, everything must be paid for."

Collins didn't like the sound of that. *Pay?* This place wasn't as civilized as he had thought. No one had mentioned paying. Why did they bring it up now?

"Why didn't someone stop me?" he asked desperately. "They must have known I didn't have a proper rating."

Flign shook his head. "The credit ratings are suggestions, not laws. In a civilized world, an individual has the right to his own decisions. I'm very sorry, sir." He glanced at his watch again and handed Collins the paper he had been reading. "Would you just glance at this bill and tell me whether it's in order?"

Collins took the paper and read:

One Palace, with Accessories	Cr.	450,000,000
Services of Maxima Olph Movers		111,000
122 Dancing Girls		122,000,000
Perfect Health		888,234,031

He scanned the rest of the list quickly. The total came to slightly better than eighteen billion Credits.

"Wait a minute!" Collins shouted. "I can't be held to this! The Utilizer just dropped into my room by accident!"

"That's the very fact I'm going to bring to their attention," Flign said. "Who knows? Perhaps they will be reasonable. It does no harm to try."

Collins felt the room sway. Flign's face began to melt before him.

"Time's up," Flign said. "Good luck."

Collins closed his eyes.

WHEN he opened them again, he was standing on a bleak plain, facing a range of stubby mountains. A cold wind lashed his face and the sky was the color of steel.

A raggedly dressed man was standing beside him. "Here," the

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man said and handed Collins a pick.

"What's this?"

"This is a pick," the man said patiently. "And over there is a quarry, where you and I and a number of others will cut marble."

"Marble?"

"Sure. There's always some idiot who wants a palace," the man said with a wry grin. "You can call me Jang. We'll be together for some time."

Collins blinked stupidly. "How long?"

"You work it out," Jang said. "The rate is fifty credits a month until your debt is paid off."

The pick dropped from Collins' hand. They couldn't do this to him! The Utilization Corporation must realize its mistake by now! *They* had been at fault, letting the machine slip into the past. Didn't they realize that?

"It's all a mistake!" Collins said.

"No mistake," Jang said. "They're very short of labor. Have to go recruiting all over for it. Come on. After the first thousand years you won't mind it."

Collins started to follow Jang toward the quarry. He stopped.

"The first *thousand* years? I won't live that long!"

"Sure you will," Jang assured him. "You got immortality, didn't you?"

Yes, he had. He had wished for it, just before they took back the machine. Or had they taken back the machine *after* he wished for it?

Collins remembered something. Strange, but he didn't remember seeing immortality on the bill Flign had showed him.

"How much did they charge me for immortality?" he asked.

Jang looked at him and laughed. "Don't be naïve, pal. You should have it figured out by now."

He led Collins toward the quarry. "Naturally, they give *that* away for nothing."

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

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HIGH MAN

By JAY CLARKE

Roger got his chance to rise in the world . . . and wound up with his head in the clouds!

Illustrated by KOSSIN

London, W. 1
April 3

Roger Brisby
Hotel Massilon
New York, N. Y.

Roger dearest,

I haven't heard from you since you arrived in New York. Are you well?

All my love,
Anne

London, W. 1
April 11

Roger dear,

Really, Roger, you might have some consideration. After all, I *am* your fiancée. The very least you could do is drop me a postal card, even if you *are* on a business trip. I worry about you, Roger. It's been three weeks since I've heard from you.

Love,
Anne

London, W. 1
April 16

My dear Roger,

I won't stand for it. I simply *won't*! I know you too well! You're probably running around

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with those awful American women, and using *my* money to do it! Business trip, indeed! Don't think an ocean between us is going to stop me from finding out what you're doing! You write me this instant!

Anne

VIA WU CABLES LONDON APR 24
ROGER BRISBY
HOTEL MASSILON NY
FIVE WEEKS SINCE WORD FROM YOU STOP IF DONT HEAR FROM YOU TWENTY FOUR REPEAT TWENTY FOUR HOURS COMMA ENGAGEMENT BROKEN STOP ALSO WILL SUE FOR BREACH OF PROMISE COMMA DESERTION COMMA AND EXTORTION AND FRAUD FOR MONEY YOU HAVE BORROWED FROM ME STOP CABLE COLLECT STOP I STOPPED YOUR DRAW ON MY ACCOUNT AT BANK STOP ANNE

Hotel Massilon, N. Y.
April 25

My dearest Anne,

Please forgive the delay in replying to your letters and cable. The truth is that I was quite unable to write, anxious as I was to do so. It's a rather long story, but I would like to explain just how this came to be and so prove how unfounded your suspicions were.

You see, shortly after I arrived here, I ran into a Professor Phelps - Smythe Burdinghaugh, lately of England. Professor Burdinghaugh has been forced to resign from several universities in England because of the rather free manner in which he conducted his experiments. He admitted that no less than 16 physics laboratories have been demolished through his own miscalculations.

At any rate, finding the atmosphere in our country somewhat cool toward his continued researches, he came to New York, which, as you know, is inhabited wholly by wealthy eccentrics, tourists and boors. Such an environment was eminently suited to the Professor's needs and he settled here to work on an anti-gravity belt, his lifelong project.

You may wonder, reasonably enough, what Professor Burdinghaugh has to do with the delay in writing to you, but I assure you that, were it not for him, you would have heard from me much sooner. Much sooner indeed.

It all began with a Scotch-and-water. The Professor and I were each having one and inevitably we struck up a conversation. We chatted on a great number of topics and I remember that he was quite impressed when I told him you were indeed the *Chemicals* Anne Harrodsbury. Not long after this, the old boy (he is fifty-ish and rather heavy) invited me in the flush of good comradeship (and good Scotch) to take part in

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his latest experiment with his anti-gravity unit. Feeling rather light-headed, I heartily acclaimed his suggestion and we repaired to his laboratory.

"My boy," he said to me later, as he strapped a bulky belt around my waist. "My boy, you are about to witness a milestone in history. Most assuredly, a milestone."

I nodded, basking in the old boy's magnificent confidence.

"We are about to enter a new era," he continued. "The Era of Space!"

His voice dropped to a low, comradely whisper. "And I have chosen you, my boy, to assist me in forging this trail to new suns, new worlds, new civilizations! The whole Galaxy lies before us!"

I could see only Professor Burdinghaugh's massive girth before me, but I assumed he could see things much more clearly than I.

The Professor filled our glasses from the bottle I had bought, then put his face close to mine. "Do you know why no one has ever invented an anti-gravity belt?" he confided. "*I'll* tell you—it takes research, and research takes money. And money is very hard to get. Especially," he added, gazing somberly at his highball; "in *my* field of research."

He shrugged, then busied himself with some adjustments on the belt he had wrapped around me. "There," he said finally, stepping back, "it's ready." We went outside to the garden behind his laboratory.

"All my life," he mused, "I've wanted to be the first to defy gravity, but—" here a suspicious wetness glistened in his eyes—"my fondness for good food and good drink has paid its price. I am far too heavy for the belt. That's why I am giving *you* this chance to roar to fame. You—*you* will have the glory, while I . . ." He choked, then quickly drained his glass.

"Enough! The stars are waiting! The experiment must begin!" He paused to refill his glass from the bottle he had brought out with him.

"When I say, *'Go!'* push this button on the belt," he explained. "Ready?"

I nodded.

"A toast first!" he cried. Soberly, he gazed at his glass. "To Man," he pronounced momentously, "and the Stars." He took a sizable swallow, then fixed me with a feverish glare.

"Go!"

I confess that never, before or since, have I felt such a strange sensation as when I pushed the button on the belt. Suddenly, I felt like a leaf, or a feather, floating on a soft warm curl of cloud. It was as if all the troubles, all the cares of the world had been

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miraculously lifted from my shoulders. A glow of well-being seemed to pulse through my whole body.

The sound of Professor Burdinghaugh's voice brought an abrupt end to this strange lightness of mind. The Professor was pointing at me with an intensity I rarely before have seen, muttering, "It works—*it works*!" He seemed rather amazed.

I looked down and, with a feeling I can only describe as giddiness, saw that indeed it *was* working. I was rising slowly from the ground and was then about a foot in the air.

At this historical juncture, we looked at each other for a moment, then began to laugh as success rushed to our heads. The Professor even did a mad little jig while, for my part, I gyrated in the air unrestrained.

It was not until I was about ten feet off the ground that I began to feel uneasy. I was never one to stomach high altitudes, you might recall, and the sight of ten feet of emptiness beneath me was disquieting.

"Professor," I asked hesitantly, "how do I turn off the belt?"

Burdinghaugh's glass stopped an inch from his lips. "Turn it off?" he countered thickly.

"*Yes!*" I shouted, now fifteen feet in the air. "How do I turn it off? How do I get down?"

The Professor gazed up at me thoughtfully. "My boy," he said at last, "I never thought about getting down—been much too concerned with getting jolly well *up*."

"*Burdinghaugh!*" I screamed. "Get me *down*!" I was now twenty feet above the ground.

"I'm sorry, old boy, dreadfully sorry," he called to me. "I can't. But don't think your life will have been spent in vain. Indeed not! I'll see to it that you get proper credit as my assistant when the anti-gravity belt is perfected. You've been invaluable, dear boy, invaluable!" His voice faded.

"*Professor!*" I screamed futilely, but by then we were too far apart to make ourselves heard and, even as I wasted my breath, a gust of wind caught me and sent me soaring into the air, spinning like a top. But, just before I entered a cloud, I saw the Professor standing far below, his feet planted wide apart, his head thrown back while he watched my progress. I fancied that, as I disappeared into the mist, he waved a solemn good-by and drank my health.

You can't imagine the torture I went through as I sailed through the air. During those first few moments, I had felt light, carefree, buoyant. But, in these higher altitudes, I was buffeted by strong

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winds, pelted by rain in enormous quantities and subjected to sudden drops that had me gasping. How I managed to survive, I can't understand. Surely, I would have died if I had floated completely out of the atmosphere but, luckily, the belt's power to lift me leveled off at about 10,000 feet.

For days, I drifted at that altitude, blown willy-nilly by the contrary winds, starved and bitterly cold. Several times, I tried to steer myself—but to no avail. I was powerless to control my flight. My sense of direction left me and I had no idea where I was. Sometimes, I would look down through a rift in the clouds and see farmland, or perhaps cities. Once I glimpsed the sea—and shut my eyes.

It was not until the sixth day of my flight that I noticed a change. I was sinking. Slowly but steadily, I was losing altitude. I was at a loss to explain this phenomenon at first, but then I remembered that the Professor had said the belt was powered by batteries. Obviously, the batteries were weakening.

A few hours later, I landed gently, only a few blocks from where I had started my unwilling flight. During those six frightful days, I must have been blown around in circles. Weak, starved, shaken, sick, I was taken to a hospital, from which I have just been released. Needless to say, I immediately tried to locate Professor Burdinghaugh, but have been unable to find a trace of him. You might say he has disappeared into thin air.

You must be wondering, of course, what this singular adventure has to do with my not writing you earlier. However, I feel certain you understand now that writing was impossible under the circumstances.

All the ink in my fountain pen leaked out when I reached the altitude of 10,000 feet—I have the kind of pen that writes under water—and I had to put my pencil between my teeth to keep them from chattering and knocking out my inlays. During my stay at the hospital, of course, I couldn't write, as I was too weak even to flirt with the nurses—which, as you know, is very weak indeed.

So, please forgive my unfortunate lapse in correspondence. Truly, I would have written, had it been possible.

Devotedly,

Roger

P.S. I resent your implication that I am engaged to you only because of your money. The fact that you are extremely wealthy and that I have virtually nothing, as I have told you many times before, never has and never will have anything to do with my love

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for you. I'm particularly hurt by your suspicion that I'd spend your money on other women. Really, I'm shocked that such a thing could even occur to you. And, now that you know why I haven't written before, I trust you'll restore my draw on your account at the bank. My funds are rather low.

Roger

London, W. 1
May 1

Dear Roger,

I always sensed you were a despicable, smooth-talking gold-digger—but I didn't really convince myself of it until I read your letter. Do you really expect me to believe that story? An anti-gravity belt! What do you take me for—one of your silly impressionable American women?

Besides, I happen to have met your Professor Phelps-Smythe Burdinghaugh in London, only a few days ago, and he assured me that, while he *had* met you in New York, it was under very different circumstances from those you described. He said you were with two women and that all three of you were quite drunk. He also said he had never invented an anti-gravity belt and seemed rather amused at the idea.

Needless to say, he was surprised to learn that I was your fiancée. He was under the impression that you were engaged to some American girl, he said, but he couldn't tell *which* one. That was the last straw.

This is the end, Roger. Our engagement is broken. I bear you no ill will—indeed, I'm glad it's all over. The one thing I'm furious about is the way you maligned the Professor, trying to make me think *he* was responsible for your not writing. How perfectly ridiculous!

Really, Roger, you would do well to model yourself after the Professor. He is so charming, so cultured, so thoughtful! I'll never forgive you for trying to blame him for your own shortcomings.

Anne

P.S. For obvious reasons, I shan't restore your draw on my account at the bank. And that's another thing. I thought you were awfully vague about what "business" you had in New York, and now I know. The Professor said you told him you were on vacation. Business trip indeed! *Cad!*

Anne

London, W. 1
May 3

My dear boy,

Ever since I watched you disappear into that cloud, I have been trying to think of some way to make up to you the beastly suffering you must have experienced at my behest. At long last,

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I have discovered a way.

Immediately after the experiment, I found it necessary to return to London. While there, seeking funds to continue my researches, I happened to meet your fiancée. It was at this moment that I conceived the plan for which I know you will be eternally thankful.

I had been troubled by the fact that the world was being deprived of your obvious natural brilliance in applied science—who else would have thought of needing a button to *turn off* the antigravity belt?—because of your ties to more material things. Namely, your fiancée. I therefore resolved to free you from your bonds—and hers—and give the world the benefit of your genius.

Carrying out this plan was no easy task, however, and I am sure you will appreciate the problems involved. I first had to convince Anne that your story was pure rot, or else she would have hung on to you like a leech for the rest of your life. This I did by denying all particulars of your story—or, rather, by telling the truth about your activities in New York—and adding a few embellishments of my own.

Of course, this was only temporary relief. I knew something more permanent had to be done to keep her from ruining your bright future. It was clear there was only one solution—I had to woo her myself. I may add that she has found me not unattractive and so I have every reason to believe we shall be married within the fortnight.

Thus, I have rid you of all entanglements and freed you to use your vast talents to advance the cause of science. At the same time, if I may return to a more materialistic plane, I have provided myself with sufficient funds to carry on my researches, since Anne will gladly supply same.

But please—do not feel in debt to me. I consider it a privilege to sacrifice myself to Anne for such a glorious cause. Then too, ladies of such obvious refinement—and means—always have appealed to me.

I hope that in this small way I have in part repaid you for your invaluable contribution to my work.

Sincerely,

Phelps-Smythe Burdinghaugh

P.S. Since, by marrying Anne, I shall become your creditor, I suggest you make arrangements with utmost despatch to repay the monies you borrowed from her. Shall we say thirty days, dear boy?

My researches are quite expensive. I do, you know, still have a quite genuine fondness for good food and drink.

PSB

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Brisby Enterprises, Inc., N. Y.
June 5

My dear Burdinghaugh,

You win. Anne is yours, for which I am glad. I may have forgotten to tell you that nearly all of her funds are in untouchable trusts—not in bonds.

In regard to the monies due you, my cheque will be in the mails this week. Such trifling amounts now mean nothing to me.

As for your methods in usurping my relationship with Anne, I have only admiration—speaking as one professional to another, of course. Unfortunately, however, in your eagerness to get your hands on Anne's fortune, you quite overlooked one very important item—the key item, in fact—the anti-gravity belt.

It may be of interest to you that I have taken out a patent on the belt and am manufacturing small units for toy spaceships. The "gimmick," as these American subjects put it, is "hot" and the turnover is fantastic. The toy ships rise and rise into the sky and never come down and, as soon as they disappear, the junior rocketmen immediately start bawling for another one. It isn't quite the Era of Space, but it's considerably more profitable.

Pity you hadn't thought about patenting the belt—these Americans are so free with their dollars.

But then, you have Anne. What could be fairer?

Gratefully yours,
Roger

—JAY CLARKE

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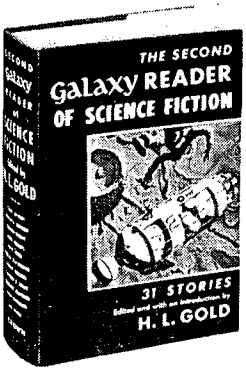

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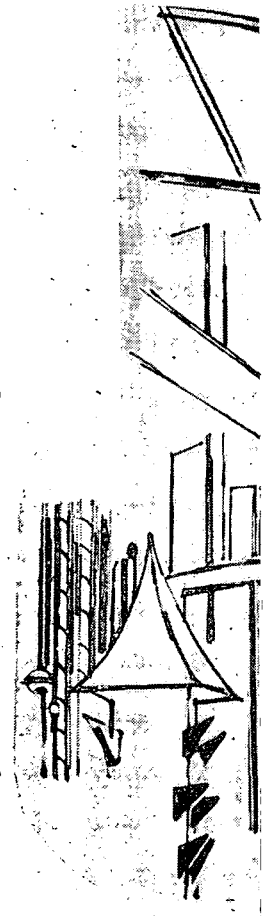
When enemy aliens can outbreed humanity, good old biology isn't good enough . . . but there IS an answer and it is to be found:

Down Among The Dead Men

By WILLIAM TENN



Illustrated by ASHMAN

I STOOD in front of The Junkyard's outer gate and felt my stomach turn over slowly, grindingly, the way it had when I saw a whole terrestrial sub-fleet—close to 20,000 men—blown to bits in the Second Battle of Saturn, more than eleven years ago. But then there had been shattered fragments of ships in my visiplate and imagined screams of men in my mind, there had been the expanding images of the Eoti's boxlike craft surging through the awful, drifting wreckage they had created, to account for the icy sweat that wound itself like a flat serpent around my forehead and my neck.

Now there was nothing but a large, plain building, very much like the hundreds of other factories in the busy suburbs of Old Chicago, a manufacturing establishment surrounded by a locked gate and spacious proving

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grounds—The Junkyard. Yet the sweat on my skin was colder, the heave of my stomach more spastic than it had ever been in any of those countless, ruinous battles that had created this place.

ALL of which was very understandable, I told myself. What I was feeling was the great grandmother hag of all fears, the Ancient of Days, the most basic rejection and reluctance of which my flesh was capable. It was understandable—but that didn't help any. I still couldn't walk up to the sentry at the gate.

I'd been almost all right until I'd seen the huge square can against the fence, the can with the slight stink coming out of it and the big colorful sign on top:

DON'T *WASTE* WASTE
PLACE *ALL* WASTE HERE
REMEMBER—
WHATEVER IS WORN CAN BE SHORN
WHATEVER IS MAIMED CAN BE RECLAIMED
WHATEVER IS USED CAN BE RE-USED
PLACE *ALL* WASTE HERE
—Conservation Police

I'd seen those square, compartmented cans and those signs in every barracks, every hospital, every recreation center, between here and the asteroids. But seeing them now, in this place, gave them a different meaning. I wondered if they had those other posters inside, the shorter ones. You know the kind of thing:

We need all our resources to defeat the enemy—and
GARBAGE IS OUR BIGGEST NATURAL RESOURCE.

Decorating the walls of this building with those posters would be downright ingenious.

Whatever is maimed can be reclaimed . . . I flexed my right arm inside my blue jumper sleeve. It felt like a part of me, always would feel like a part of me. And, in a couple of years, assuming that I lived that long, the thin white scar that circled the elbow joint would be completely invisible. Sure—whatever is maimed can be reclaimed. All except one thing—the most important thing.

I now felt less like going in than ever.

And then I saw this kid. The one from Arizona Base.

He was standing right in front of the sentry box, paralyzed just like me. In the center of his uniform cap was a brand-new, shiny-gold *Y* with a dot in the center—the insignia of a slingshot commander. He hadn't been wearing it the day before at the briefing. That could only mean the commission had just come through. He looked real young and real scared.

I remembered him from the briefing session. He was the one

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whose hand had timidly gone up during the question period; the one who, when he was recognized, had half-risen, worked his mouth a couple of times and finally blurted out, "Excuse me, sir, but they don't—they don't *smell* at all badly, do they?"

There had been a virtual cyclone of laughter, the yelping laughter of men who themselves had been close to the torn edge of hysteria all afternoon and who were damned glad that someone had at last said something they could make believe was funny.

And the white-haired briefing officer, who hadn't so much as smiled, waited for the hysteria to work itself out, before saying gravely, "No, they don't smell at all badly. Unless, that is, they don't bathe. The same as with you gentlemen."

THAT shut us up. Even the kid, blushing his way back into his seat, set his jaw stiffly at that reminder. And it wasn't until twenty minutes later, when we'd been dismissed, that I began to feel the ache in my own face from the unrelaxed muscles there.

"*The same as with you gentlemen . . .*"

I shook myself hard and walked over to the kid. "Hello, Commander," I said, "been here long?"

He managed a grin. "Over an hour, Commander. I caught the 8:15 out of the Base. Most of the other fellows were still sleeping off last night's party. I'd gone to bed early—I wanted to give myself as much time to get the feel of this thing as I could. Only—it doesn't seem to have done much good."

"I know. Some things you can't get used to. Some things you're not *supposed* to get used to."

He looked at my chest. "I guess this isn't your first slingshot command?"

My first? More like my twenty-first, son! But then I remembered that everyone tells me I look young for my medals, and what the hell, the kid seemed so pale under the chin. "No, not exactly my first. But I've never had a blob crew before. This is exactly as new to me as it is to you. Hey, listen, Commander—I'm having a hard time too. What say we bust through that gate together? Then the worst'll be over."

The kid nodded violently. We linked arms and marched up to the sentry. We showed him our orders. He opened the gate and said, "Straight ahead. Any elevator on your left to the fifteenth floor."

So, still arm in arm, we walked into the main entrance of the large building, up a long flight of steps and under the sign that said in red and black:

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HUMAN PROTOPLASM RECLAMATION CENTER
THIRD DISTRICT FINISHING PLANT

There were some old-looking, but very erect, men walking along the main lobby and a lot of uniformed, fairly pretty girls. I was pleased to note that most of the girls were pregnant. The first pleasing sight I had hit in almost a week.

We turned into an elevator and told the girl, "Fifteen." She punched a button and waited for it to fill up. *She* didn't seem to be pregnant. I wondered what was the matter with her.

I'd almost managed to get a good grip on my heaving imagination when I got a close look at the shoulder patches each of the other passengers was wearing. That almost did for me right there.

It was a circular red patch with the black letters *TAF* superimposed on a white G-4. *TAF* for Terrestrial Armed Forces, of course—the letters were the basic insignia of all rear echelon outfits. But why didn't they use G-1, which represented the Personnel Division? G-4 stood for Supply. *Supply!*

YOU can always trust the *TAF*. Thousands of morale specialists in all kinds of ranks, working their educated heads off to keep up the spirits of the men in the fighting perimeters—but every damned time, the good old dependable *TAF* will pick the ugliest name, the one in the worst possible taste.

Oh, sure, I told myself, you can't fight a shattering, no-quarter interstellar war for twenty-five years and keep every pretty thought dewy-damp and intact. But not *Supply*, gentlemen. Not this place—not The Junkyard. Let's at least try to keep up appearances.

Then we began going up, and while the elevator girl began announcing floors, I had lots of other things to think about.

"Third Floor—Corpse Reception and Classification," the girl operator sung out.

"Fifth Floor—Preliminary Organ Processing."

"Seventh Floor—Brain Reconstitution and Neural Alignment."

"Ninth Floor—Cosmetics, Elementary Reflexes and Muscular Control."

At this point, I forced myself to stop listening, the way you do when you're on a heavy cruiser, say, and the rear engine room gets flicked by a bolt from an Eoti scrambler. After you've been around when it's happened a couple of times, you learn to kind of close your ears and say to yourself, "I don't know anybody in that damned engine room, not

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anybody, and in a few minutes everything will be nice and quiet again." And, in a few minutes, it is. Only trouble is that then, like as not, you'll be part of the detail that's ordered into the steaming place to scrape the guck off the walls and get the jets firing again.

Same way now. Just as soon as I had that girl's voice blocked out, there we were on the fifteenth floor— "Final Interviews and Shipping" —and the kid and I had to get out.

He was real green. A definite sag around the knees, shoulders sloping forward like his clavicle had curled. Again, I was grateful to him. Nothing like having somebody to take care of.

"Come on, Commander," I whispered. "Up and at 'em. Look at it this way—for characters like us, this is practically a family reunion."

It was the wrong thing to say. He looked at me as if I'd punched his face. "No thanks to you for the reminder, mister," he said. Then he walked stiffly up to the receptionist.

I could have bitten off my tongue. I hurried after him. "I'm sorry, kid," I told him earnestly. "That damned word just slides out of my big mouth. But don't get sore at me. Hell, I had to listen to myself say it too."

He thought about it a moment and then nodded. Then he gave me a smile. "Okay—no hard feelings. It's a rough war, isn't it?"

I smiled back. "Rough? Why, if you're not careful, they tell me, you can get killed in it."

II

THE receptionist was a soft little blonde with two wedding rings on one hand, and one wedding ring on the other. From what I knew of current planetside customs, that meant she'd been widowed twice.

She took our orders and read jauntily into her desk mike, "Attention, Final Conditioning. Attention, Final Conditioning. Alert for immediate shipment the following serial numbers—70623152, 70623109, 70623166 and 70623123. Also 70538966, 70538923, 70538980 and 70538937. Please route through the correct numbered sections and check all data on *TAF AGO* Forms 362 as per *TAF* Regulation 7896 of 15 June 2145. Advise when available for Final Interviews."

I was impressed. Almost the same procedure as when you go to Ordnance for a replacement set of stern exhaust tubes.

She looked up and favored us with a lovely smile. "Your crews will be ready in a moment. Would you have a seat, gentlemen?"

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After a while, she got up to take a folder out of a file cabinet set in the wall. As she came back to her desk, I noticed she was pregnant—only about the third or fourth month—and, naturally, I gave a little satisfied nod. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the kid make the same kind of nod. We looked at each other and chuckled. "Yeah, it's a rough, rough war," he said.

"Where are you from anyway?" I asked. "That doesn't sound like a Third District accent to me."

"It isn't. I was born in Scandinavia—Eleventh Military District. My home town is Göteborg, Sweden. But, after I got my—my promotion, naturally I didn't care to see the folks any more. So, I requested a transfer to the Third, and from now on until I hit a scrambler, this is where I'll be spending my furloughs and Earthside hospitalizations."

I'd heard that a lot of the younger slingshotters felt that way. Personally, I never had a chance to find out how *I'd* feel about visiting the old folks at home. My father was knocked off in the suicidal attempt to retake Neptune—'way back when I was still in high school, learning elementary space combat — and my mother was Admiral Raguzzi's staff secretary when the flagship *Thermopylae* took a direct hit two years later, in the famous defense of Ganymede. That was before the Breeding Regulations, of course, and women were still serving in administrative positions on the fighting perimeters.

ON the other hand, at least two of my brothers might still be alive. But I'd made no attempt to contact them since getting my dotted *Y*. So, I guessed I felt the same way as the kid—which was hardly surprising.

"Are you from Sweden?" the blonde girl was asking. "My second husband was born in Sweden. Maybe you knew him—Sven Nossen? I understand he had a lot of relatives in Oslo."

The kid screwed up his eyes as if he was thinking real hard. You know, running down a list of all the Swedes in Oslo. Finally, he shook his head. "No, can't say that I do. But I wasn't out of Göteborg very often before I was called up."

She clucked sympathetically at his provincialism—the baby-faced blonde of classic anecdote. A real dumb babe. And yet—there were lots of very clever, high-pressure cuties around the inner planets these days, who had to content themselves with a one-fifth interest in some abysmal slob who boasted the barest modicum of maleness, or a certificate from the local sperm bank. Blondie

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here was on her third full husband.

Maybe, I thought, if I were looking for a wife myself, this is what I'd pick to take the stink of scrambler rays out of my nose and the yammer-yammer-yammer of Irvingles out of my ears. Maybe I'd want somebody pretty and simple to come back to from one of those complicated skirmishes with the Eoti, where you spend most of your conscious thoughts trying to figure out just what battle rhythm the filthy insects are using this time. Maybe, if I were going to get married, I'd find a well-stacked fluffhead like this more generally desirable than—oh, well, maybe. Considered as a problem in psychology, it was interesting.

I noticed she was talking to me. "You've never had a crew of this type before either, have you, Commander?"

"Zombies, you mean? No, this is my first, I'm happy to say."

She made a disapproving pout with her mouth. It was fully as cute as her approving pouts. "We do not like that word."

"All right, blobs then."

"We don't like bl—*that* word either. You are talking about human beings like yourself, Commander. Very much like yourself."

I began to get sore fast, just the way the kid had out in the hall. Then I realized she didn't mean anything by it. She didn't know. What the hell—it wasn't on our orders. I relaxed. "You tell me. What do you call them here?"

THE blonde sat up stiffly. "*We* refer to them as soldier surrogates. The epithet 'zombie' was used to describe the obsolete Model 21, which went out of production over five years ago. You will be supplied with individuals based on Model 705 and 706, which are practically perfect. In fact, in some respects—"

"No bluish skin? No slow-motion sleepwalking?"

She shook her head violently. Her eyes lit up. Evidently she'd digested all the promotional literature. Not such a fluffhead, after all—no great mind, but her husbands had evidently had someone to talk to at times. She rattled on enthusiastically.

"The cyanosis was the result of bad blood oxygenation—blood was our second most difficult tissue reconstruction problem. The nervous system was the hardest. Even though the blood cells are usually in the poorest shape of all, when the bodies arrive, we can now turn out a very serviceable rebuilt heart. But let there be the teeniest battle damage to the brain or spine, and you have to start right from scratch. And

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then the troubles in reconstitution!

"My cousin Lorna works in Neural Alignment, and she tells me all you need to make is just one wrong connection—you know how it is, Commander. At the end of the day your eyes are tired, and you're kind of watching the clock—just one wrong connection, and the reflexes in the finished individual turn out so bad that they just have to send him down to the third floor and begin all over again. But *you* don't have to worry about that. Since Model 663, we've been using the two-team inspection system in Neural Alignment. And the 700 series—oh, they've just been *wonderful.*"

"That good, eh? Better than the old-fashioned mother's son type?"

"Well-l-l." She considered. "You'd really be amazed, Commander, if you could see the very latest performance charts. Of course, there is always that big deficiency, the one activity we've never been able to—"

"One thing *I* can't understand," the kid broke in. "Why do they have to use corpses? A body's lived its life, fought its war—why not leave it alone? I know the Eoti can outbreed us merely by increasing the number of queens in their flagships, I know that manpower is the biggest single TAF problem—but we've been synthesizing protoplasm for a long, long time now. Why not synthesize the whole damn body, from toenails to frontal lobe, and turn out real honest-to-God androids that don't wallop you with the stink of death when you meet them?"

THE blonde got mad. "Our product *does not stink!* Cosmetics can now guarantee that the new models have even less of a body odor than you, young man! And we do *not* reactivate or revitalize corpses, I'll have you know. What we do is *reclaim* human protoplasm. We re-use worn-out and damaged human cellular material in the area where the greatest shortages currently occur, military personnel. You wouldn't talk about corpses, I assure you, if you saw the condition that some of those bodies are in when they arrive. Why, sometimes, in an entire baling package—a baling package contains twenty casualities—we don't find enough to make one good, whole kidney. Then we have to take a little intestinal tissue here and a bit of spleen there, alter them, unite them carefully, activa—"

"That's what I mean. If you go to all that trouble, why not start with real raw material?"

"Like what, for example?" she asked him.

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THE kid gestured with his black-gloved hands. "Basic elements—carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and so on."

"Basic elements have to come from somewhere," I pointed out gently. "You might take your hydrogen and oxygen from air and water. But from where would you get your carbon?"

"From the same place where the other synthetic manufacturers get it—coal, oil, cellulose."

The receptionist sat back and relaxed. "Those are organic substances," she reminded him. "If you're going to use raw material that was once alive, why not use the kind that comes as close as possible to the end product you have in mind? It's simple industrial economics, Commander, believe me. The best and cheapest raw material for the manufacture of soldier surrogates are soldier bodies."

"Sure," the kid said. "Makes sense. There's no other use for dead, old, beaten-up soldier bodies. Better'n shoving them in the ground, where they'd be just waste, pure waste."

Our little blonde chum started to smile in agreement, then shot him an intense glance and changed her mind. She looked very uncertain all of a sudden. When the communicator on her desk buzzed, she bent over it eagerly.

I watched her with approval. Definitely no fluffhead. Just very feminine. I sighed. You see, I judge plenty of people the wrong way, but only with women is my wrongness an all-the-time proposition. Proving again, that a hell of a lot of peculiar things turn out to have happened for the best.

"Commander," she was saying to the kid, "would you go to Room 1591? Your crew will be there in a moment." She turned to me. "And Room 1524 for you, straight ahead, Commander, if you please."

The kid nodded and walked off, very straight and erect. I waited until the door had closed behind him, then I leaned close to the receptionist. "Wish they'd change the Breeding Regulations again," I told her. "You'd make a damn fine rear-echelon orientation officer. I got more feel of The Junkyard from you than in ten briefing sessions."

She examined my face anxiously. "I hope you mean that, Commander. You see, we're all very deeply involved in this project. We're extremely proud of the progress the Third District Finishing Plant has made. We talk about the new developments all the time, everywhere—even in the cafeteria. It didn't occur to me until too late that you gentlemen might—" she blushed deep rich

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red, the way only a blonde can blush— "might take what I said personally. I'm sorry if I—"

"Nothing to be sorry about," I assured her. "All you did was talk shop. Like when I was in the hospital last month and heard two surgeons discussing how to repair a man's arm, and making it sound as if they were going to nail a new arm back on an expensive chair. Real interesting and I learned a lot."

I left her looking grateful, which is absolutely the only way to leave a woman, and barged on to Room 1524.

III

IT was evidently used as a classroom when reconverted human junk wasn't being picked up. A bunch of chairs, a long blackboard, a couple of charts.

One of the charts was on the Eoti, the basic information list that contains all the limited information we have been able to assemble on the bugs in the bloody quarter-century since they came busting in past Pluto to take over the Solar System. It hadn't been changed much since the one I'd had to memorize in high school—the only difference was a slightly longer section on intelligence and motivation. Just theory, of course, but more carefully thought-out theory than the stuff I'd learned. The big brains had now concluded that the reason all attempts at communicating with them had failed was not because they were a conquest-crazy species, but because they suffered from the same extreme xenophobia as their smaller, less intelligent communal insect cousins here on Earth.

That is, an ant wanders up to a strange ant hill—*zok!*—no discussion, he's chopped down at the entrance. And the soldier ants react even faster if it's a creature of another genus. So despite the Eoti science, which in far too many respects is more advanced than ours, they are psychologically incapable of the kind of mental projection or empathy necessary if one is to realize that a completely alien-looking neighbor has intelligence, feelings—and rights! The same as oneself. Far too many humans lack this kind of empathy, for that matter.

Well, it might be so. Meanwhile, we were locked in a murderous stalemate with the Eoti on a perimeter of never-ending battle that sometimes expanded as far as Saturn and occasionally contracted as close as Jupiter. Barring the invention of a new weapon of such unimaginable power that we could wreck their fleet before they could duplicate the weapon—as they'd been managing to up to now—our only

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hope was to somehow discover the stellar system from which they came, somehow build ourselves not one starship, but a fleet of them—and somehow wreck their home base or throw enough of a scare into it so that they'd pull back their expedition for defensive purposes. A lot of somehows.

But, if we wanted to maintain our present position until the *somehows* started to roll, our birth announcements had to take longer to read than the casualty lists. For the last decade, this hadn't been so, despite the more and more stringent Breeding Regulations, which were steadily pulverizing every one of our moral codes and sociological advances. Then, someone in the Conservation Police noticed that almost half our ships of the line had been fabricated from the metallic junk of previous battles. Where was the personnel that had manned those salvaged derelicts, he wondered . . .

And thus arrived what Blondie, outside, and her co-workers were diplomatic enough to call soldier surrogates.

I'D been a computer's mate, second class, on the old *Jenghiz Kahn* when the first batch had come aboard as battle replacements.

Let me tell you, we had real good reason for calling them zombies! Most of them were as blue as the uniforms they wore, their breathing was so noisy it made you think of asthmatics with built-in public address systems, their eyes shone with all the intelligence of petroleum jelly—*and the way they walked!*

My friend, Johnny Cruro, the first man to get knocked off in the Great Breakthrough of 2143, used to say that they walked as if they were trying to pick their way down a steep hill at the bottom of which was a large, open, family-size grave. Body held strained and tense—legs and arms moving slow, slow, until suddenly they'd finish with a jerk—creepy as hell.

They weren't good for anything but the drabbest fatigue detail. And even then . . . If you told them to polish a gun mounting, you had to remember to come back in an hour and turn them off, or they might scrub their way clear through into empty space. Of course, they weren't all that bad. Johnny Cruro used to say he'd met one or two who could achieve imbecility when they were feeling right.

Combat was what finished them, so far as the *TAF* was concerned. Not that they broke under battle conditions—just the reverse. The old ship would be

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rocking and screaming as it changed course every few seconds, every Irvingle, scrambler and nucleonic howitzer along the firing corridor turning bright golden yellow from the heat it was generating, a hoarse, yelping voice from the bulkhead loudspeakers pouring out orders, men staggering from one emergency station to another, everyone around you working like a blur and cursing and wondering out loud why the Eoti were taking so long to tag a target as big and as slow as the *Khan*. Then, suddenly, you'd see a zombie clutching a broom in his rubbery hands and sweeping the deck in the slack-jawed, moronic and horribly earnest way they had . . .

I remember whole gun crews going amuck and slamming into the zombies with long crowbars and metal-gloved fists. Once, even an officer, sprinting back to the control room, flipped out his side-arm and pumped bolt after bolt of jagged thunder at a blue-skin who'd been peacefully wiping a porthole while the bow of the ship was being burned away. And, as the zombie sagged uncomprehendingly and uncomplainingly to the floor-plates, the young officer stood over him and chanted soothingly, the way you do to a boisterous dog, "Down, boy, down. *Down, down, damn you, DOWN!*"

THAT was the reason the zombies were eventually pulled back. Not because of inefficiency—the incidence of battle psycho around them just shot up too high. Maybe, if it hadn't been for that, we'd have gotten used to them eventually—God knows you get used to enough in combat. But the zombies belonged to something beyond mere war.

They were so terribly, terribly unstirred by the prospect of dying again!

Well, everyone said the new models were a big improvement. They'd better be. A slingshot may

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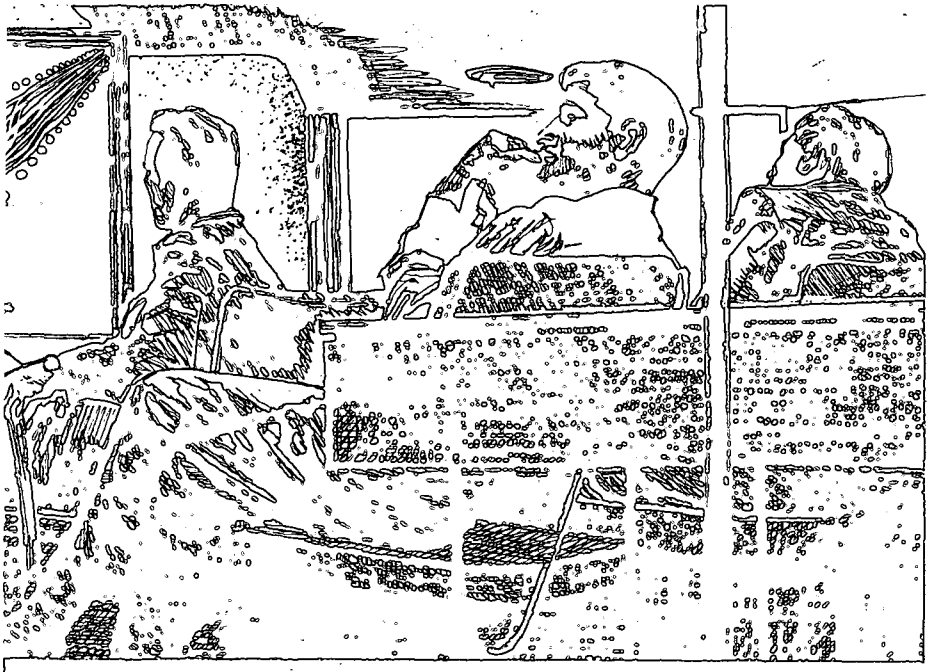

be one thin notch below an outright suicide patrol, but you need peak performance from every man aboard if you're going to complete its crazy mission, let alone return. And it's an awful small ship, and the men have to kind of get along with each other in very close quarters.

I heard feet, several pairs of them, rapping along the corridor. They stopped outside the door.

They waited. I waited. My skin began to prickle. And then I heard that uncertain shuffling sound. *They* were nervous about meeting *me!*

I walked over to the window and stared down at the drill field, where old veterans, whose minds and bodies were too worn-out to be repaired, taught fatigue-uniformed zombies how to use their newly conditioned reflexes in close-order drill.

And then, when the hands I'd clasped behind me had almost squeezed their blood back into my wrists, I heard the door open and four pairs of feet clatter into the room. The door closed, and four pairs of feet clicked to attention.

I turned around.

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They were saluting me. *Well, what the hell,* I told myself, *they're supposed to be saluting me. I am their commanding officer.* I returned the salute and four arms whipped down smartly.

I said, "At ease." They snapped their legs apart, arms behind them. I thought about it and said, "Rest." They relaxed their bodies slightly. I thought about it again. I said, "Hell, men, sit down and let's meet each other."

They sprawled into chairs, and I hitched myself up on the instructor's desk. We stared back and forth. Their faces were rigid, watchful—they weren't giving anything away.

I wondered what my face looked like. In spite of all the orientation lectures, in spite of all the preparation, I must admit that my first glimpse of them had hit me hard. They were glowing with health, normalcy and hard purpose. But that wasn't it.

That wasn't it at all!

What was making me want to run out of the door, out of the building, was something I'd been schooling myself to expect since that last briefing session in Arizona Base. Four dead men were staring at me. Four very famous dead men.

The big man, lounging all over his chair, was Roger Grey, who had been killed over a year ago when he rammed his tiny scoutship up the forward jets of an Eoti flagship. He'd split the flagship neatly in two. Almost every medal imaginable and the Solar Corona. Grey was to be my co-pilot.

THE thin, alert man with the tight shock of black hair was Wang Hsi. He had been killed covering the retreat to the asteroids after the Great Breakthrough of 2143. According to the fantastic story the observers told, his ship had still been firing after it had been scrambled three times. Almost every medal imaginable and the Solar Corona. Wang was to be my engineer.

The darkish little fellow was Yussuf Lamehd. He'd been killed in a very minor skirmish off Titan, but at the time of his death, he was the most decorated man in the entire *TAF*. A *double* Solar Corona. Lamehd was to be my gunner.

The heavy one was Stanley Weinstein, the only prisoner of war ever to escape from the Eoti. There wasn't much left of him by the time he'd arrived on Mars, but the ship he had come in was the first enemy craft that humanity could study intact. There was no Solar Corona in his day for him to receive even posthumously, but they're still naming military academies after him. Weinstein was to be my astrogator.

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Then I shook myself back to reality. These weren't the original heroes, probably didn't have even one particle of Roger Grey's blood or Wang Hsi's flesh upon their reconstructed bones. They were just excellent and faithful copies, made to minute physical specifications which had been in the *TAF* medical files since Wang had been a cadet and Grey a young recruit.

IV

THERE were anywhere from a hundred to a thousand Yussuf Lamehds and Stanley Weinsteins, I had to remind myself—and they had all come off an assembly line a few floors down. "Only the brave deserve the future," was The Junkyard's motto, and it was currently trying to assure that future for them by duplicating in quantity any *TAF* man who went out with especial heroism.

There was that little gimmick of industrial efficiency again. If you're using mass production methods, and The Junkyard was doing just that, it's plain common sense to turn out a few standardized models, rather than have everyone different — like the stuff an individual creative craftsman might come up with. Well, if they are to be standardized models, why not use those that have positive and relatively pleasant associations bound up with their appearance rather than anonymous characters from the designers' drawing boards?

Another reason for using hero models was almost more important and harder to define. According to the briefing officer yesterday, there was an obscure feeling — a superstitious feeling, almost — that, if you copied a hero's features, musculature, metabolism and even his cortex wrinkles carefully enough, you *might* build yourself another hero. Of course, the original personality would never reappear — that had been produced by long years of environment and dozens of other very slippery factors — but it was distinctly possible, the bio-techs felt, that a modicum of useful courage resided in the body structure alone.

Well, at least these zombies didn't *look* like zombies! For which I was grateful.

On impulse, I plucked the rolled sheaf of papers containing our travel orders out of my pocket, pretended to study it and let it slip suddenly through my fingers. As the outspread sheaf spiraled to the floor in front of me, Roger Grey reached out and caught it. He handed it back to me with the same kind of easy yet snappy grace. I took it, feeling good. It was the way he moved. I like to

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see a co-pilot move that way.

"Thanks," I said.

He just nodded.

I STUDIED Yussuf Lamehd next. Yes, he had it too. Whatever it is that makes a first-class gunner, he had it. It's almost impossible to describe, but you walk into a bar in some rest area on Eros, say, and out of the five slingshotters hunched over the blowtop table, you know right off which is the gunner. It's a sort of carefully bottled nervousness or a dead calm with a hair-trigger attachment. Whatever it is, it's what you need. Lamehd had it so strong I'd have put money on him against any other gunner in the *TAF* I'd ever seen in action.

Astrogators and engineers are different. You've got to see them work under pressure before you can begin to rate them. But, even so, I liked the calm and confident manner with which Wang Hsi and Weinstein sat under my examination. And I liked them.

Right then, I felt a hundred pounds slide off my chest. I felt relaxed for the first time in days. I really liked my crew, zombies or no. We'd make it.

I decided to tell them. "Men," I said, "I think we'll really get along. I think we've got the makings of a sweet, smooth slingshot. You'll find me—"

And I stopped. That cold, slightly mocking look in their eyes. The way they had glanced at each other when I told them I thought we'd get along, glanced at each other and blown slightly through distended nostrils. I realized that none of them had said anything since they'd come in. They'd just been watching me and their eyes weren't exactly warm.

I stopped and let my mind take a long, deep breath. For the first time, it was occurring to me that I'd been worrying about just one end of the problem, maybe the least important end. I'd been worrying about how *I'd* react to them and how much *I'd* be able to accept them as shipmates. They were zombies, after all. It had never occurred to me to wonder how *they'd* feel about me.

And there was evidently something very wrong in how they felt about me.

"What is it, men?" I asked. They all looked at me inquiringly. "What's on your minds? What's bothering you?"

They kept looking at me. Weinstein pursed his lips and tilted his chair back and forth. It creaked. Nobody said anything.

"Grey," I said walking up and down in the front of the classroom. "You look as if you've got a great big knot inside you. Want to tell me about it?"

"No, Commander," he said

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slowly and deliberately. "I do not want to tell you about it."

I grimaced. "If anyone wants to say anything — anything at all — it'll be off the record — *completely* off the record. Also, for the moment, we'll forget about such matters as rank and *TAF* regulations." I waited. "Wang? Lamehd? How about you, Weinstein?" They stared at me silently. Weinstein's chair creaked back and forth.

IT had me baffled. What kind of gripe could they have against me? They'd never met me before. But I knew one thing—I wasn't going to haul a crew nursing a sub-surface grudge as unanimous as this aboard a slingshot. I wasn't going to chop space with those eyes at my back. It would be more efficient for me to shove my head against an Irvingle lens and push the button.

"Listen," I told them, "I meant what I said about forgetting rank and *TAF* regulations. I want to run a happy ship, and I have to know what's up. We'll be living —the five of us—in the tightest, most cramped conditions Man has yet been able to devise. We'll be operating a tiny ship whose only purpose is to dodge, at tremendous speed, through the firepower and screening devices of the largest enemy craft and deliver a single, crippling blast from a single, oversize Irvingle. If we don't get along, if there's any unspoken hostility getting in our way, the ship won't operate at maximum efficiency. And that way, we're through before we—"

"Commander," Weinstein said suddenly, his chair coming down upon the floor with a solid whack, "I'd like to ask you a question."

"Sure," I said and let out a gust of relief that was the size of a small hurricane. "Ask me anything."

"When you think about us, Commander, or when you talk about us, which word do you use?"

I looked at him and shook my head. "Eh?"

"When you talk about us, Commander, or when you think about us, do you call us zombies? Or do you call us blobs? That's what I'd like to know, Commander. That's what I'm curious about."

He'd spoken in such a polite, even tone that I was a long time getting the full significance of it.

"Personally," said Roger Grey in a voice that was just a little less polite, a little less even. "Personally, I think the Commander is the kind who refers to us as canned meat. Right, Commander?"

Yussuf Lamehd folded his arms across his chest and seemed to consider the issue very

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thoughtfully. "I think you're right, Rog. He's the canned-meat type. Definitely the canned-meat type."

"No," said Wang Hsi. "He doesn't use that kind of language. Zombies, yes — canned meat, no. You can observe from the way he talks that he wouldn't ever get mad enough to tell us to get back in the can. And I don't think he'd call us blobs very often. He's the kind of guy who'd buttonhole another slingshot commander and tell him, 'Man, have I got the sweetest zombie crew you ever saw!' That's the way *I* figure him. Zombies."

And then they were sitting quietly, staring at me again. And it wasn't mockery in their eyes. It was hatred.

I WENT back to the desk and sat down. The room was very still. From the yard, fifteen floors down, the marching commands drifted up. Where did they latch on to this zombie — blob — canned-meat stuff? They were none of them more than six months old: they had none of them been outside the precincts of The Junkyard yet. Their conditioning, while mechanical and intensive, was supposed to be absolutely foolproof, producing hard, resilient and entirely human minds, highly skilled in their various specialties and as far from any kind of imbalance as the latest psychiatric knowledge could push them. I knew they wouldn't have gotten it in their conditioning. Then *where* . . .?

And then I heard it clearly for a moment. The word that was being used down in the drill field instead of *Hup!* That strange new word I had only heard indistinctly through the window. Whoever was calling the cadence downstairs wasn't saying, "*Hup,* two, three, four!"

He was saying, "*Blob,* two, three, four! *Blob,* two, three four!"

Wasn't that just like the *TAF,* I asked myself? For that matter, like any army anywhere, anytime? To expend fortunes and the best minds producing a highly necessary product to exact specifications, and then, on the very first level of military use, doing something that might invalidate it completely! I visualized those *TAF* drill-hacks with their narrow, nasty minds, as jealously proud of their prejudices as of their limited and painfully acquired military knowledge, giving these youngsters before me their first taste of genuine barracks life, their first glimpse of the "outside." It was so stupid!

But was it? There was another way of looking at it, beyond the fact that only soldiers too old physically and too ossified men-

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tally for any other duty could be spared for this place. And that was the simple pragmatism of army thinking. The fighting perimeters were places of abiding horror and agony. The forward combat zones in which slingshots operated were even worse. If men or materials were going to collapse out there, it could be very costly. Let the collapses occur as close to the rear echelons as possible.

MAYBE it made sense, I thought. Maybe it was logical to make live men out of dead men's flesh at such enormous expense, and with the kind of care usually associated with things like cotton wool and the most delicate watchmakers' tools, and then to turn around and subject them to the coarsest, ugliest environment possible, an environment that perverted their carefully instilled loyalty into hatred, their finely balanced psychological adjustment into neurotic sensitivity.

I didn't know if it was basically smart or dumb, or even if the problem had ever been really weighed as such by the upper, policy-making brass. All I could see was my own problem, and it looked awfully big to me. I thought of my attitude toward these men before meeting them, and I felt pretty sick. But the memory gave me an idea.

"Hey, tell me something," I suggested. "What would you call me?"

They looked puzzled.

"You want to know what I call you," I explained. "Tell me first what you call people like me, people who are — who are *born*. You must have your own epithets."

Lamehd grinned so that his teeth showed a bright, mirthless white against his dark skin. "*Realos*," he said. "We call you people *realos*. Sometimes *realo trulos*."

Then the rest spoke up. There were other names, lots of other names. They wanted me to hear them all. They interrupted each other; they spat the words out as if they were missiles. They glared at my face, as they spat them out, to see how much impact they had. Some of the nicknames were funny, some of them were rather nasty. I was particularly charmed by *utie* and *wombat*.

"All right," I said after a while. "Feel better?"

They were all breathing hard, but they felt better. I could tell it, and they knew it. The air in the room felt softer now.

"First off," I said, "I want you to notice that you are all big boys and, as such, can take care of yourselves. From here on out, if we walk into a bar or a rec

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camp together, and someone of approximately your rank says something that sounds like *zombie* to your acute ears, you are at liberty to walk up to him and start taking him apart — if you can. If he's of approximately my rank, in all probability, *I'll* do the taking apart, simply because I'm a very sensitive commander. And any time you feel that I'm not treating you as human beings, one hundred per cent, full solar citizenship and all that, I give you permission to come up to me and say, 'Now look *here*, you dirty utie, sir . . .' "

The four of them grinned. Warm grins. Then the grins faded away, very slowly, and the eyes grew cold again. They were looking at a man who was, after all, an outsider.

"It's not as simple as that, Commander," Wang Hsi said. "Unfortunately. You can call us hundred per cent human beings, but we're not. And anyone who wants to call us blobs or canned meat has a certain right. Because we're not as good as — as you mothers' sons, and we know it. And we'll never be that good. Never!"

"I don't know about that," I blustered. "Why, some of your performance charts . . ."

"Performance charts, Commander," Wang Hsi said softly, "do not a human being make."

On his right, Weinstein gave a nod, thought a bit and added, "Nor groups of men a race."

V

I KNEW where we were going now. And I wanted to smash my way out of that room, down the elevator and out of the building before anybody said another word. *This is it,* I told myself. *Here we are, boy, here we are.* I found myself squirming from corner to corner of the desk. I gave up, got off it and began walking again.

Wang Hsi wouldn't let go. I should have known he wouldn't. "Soldier surrogates," he went on, squinting as if he were taking a close look at the phrase for the first time. "Soldier surrogates, but not soldiers. We're not soldiers, because soldiers are men. And we, Commander, are not men."

There was silence for a moment, then a tremendous blast of sound boiled out of my mouth. "And what makes you think that you're *not* men?"

Wang Hsi was looking at me with astonishment, but his reply was still soft and calm. "You know why. You've seen our specifications, Commander. We're not men, real men, because we can't reproduce ourselves."

I forced myself to sit down again and carefully placed my

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shaking hands over my knees.

"We're as sterile," I heard Yussuf Lamehd say, "as boiling water."

"There have been lots of men," I began, "who have been—"

"This isn't a matter of lots of men," Weinstein broke in. "This is a matter of us — *all* of us."

"Blobs thou art," Wang Hsi murmured, "and to blobs returneth. They might have given at least a few of us a chance. The kids mightn't have turned out so bad."

Roger Grey slammed his huge hand down on the arm of his chair. "That's just the point, Wang," he said savagely. "The kids might have turned out good —too good. Our kids might have turned out to be better than their kids — and where would that leave the proud and cocky, the goddam name-calling, the *realo trulo* human race?"

I sat staring at them once more, but now I was seeing a different picture. I wasn't seeing conveyor belts moving slowly along, covered with human tissues and organs on which earnest bio-techs performed their individual tasks. I wasn't seeing a room filled with dozens of adult male bodies suspended in nutrient solution, each body connected to a conditioning machine which, day and night, clacked out whatever minimum information was necessary for the body to take the place of a man in the bloodiest part of the fighting perimeter.

THIS time, I saw a barracks filled with heroes, many of them in duplicate and triplicate. And they were sitting around griping, as men will in any barracks on any planet, whether they looked like heroes or not. But their gripes concerned humiliations deeper than any soldiers had hitherto known—humiliations as basic as the fabric of human personality.

"You believe, then," and despite the sweat on my face, my voice was gentle, "that the reproductive power was deliberately withheld?"

Weinstein scowled. "Now Commander. Please. No bedtime stories."

"Doesn't it occur to you at all that the whole problem of our species at the moment is reproduction? Believe me, men, that's all you hear about on the outside. Grammar school debating teams kick current reproductive issues back and forth in the district medal competitions. Every month, scholars in archeology and the botany of fungi come out with books about it from their own special angle. Everyone knows that if we don't lick the reproduction problem, the Eoti are going to lick us. Do you seri-

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ously think that, under such circumstances, the reproductive powers of *anyone* would be intentionally impaired?"

"What do a few male blobs matter, more or less?" Grey demanded. "According to the latest news bulletins, sperm bank deposits are at their highest point in five years. They don't need us."

"Commander," Wang Hsi pointed his triangular chin at me, "let me ask you a few questions. Do you honestly expect us to believe that a science capable of reconstructing a living, highly effective human body with a complex digestive system and a most delicate nervous system is incapable of reconstructing the germ plasm in one single, solitary case?"

"You have to believe it," I told him, "because it's so."

Wang sat back, and so did the other three. They stopped looking at me.

"Haven't you ever heard it said," I pleaded with them, "that the germ plasm is more essentially the individual than any other part of him? That some whimsical biologists take the attitude that our human bodies and all bodies are merely vehicles, or hosts, by means of which our germ plasm reproduces itself? It's the most complex bio-technical riddle we have. Believe me, men," I added passionately, "when I say that biology has not yet solved the germ plasm problem, I'm telling the truth. I know."

That got them.

"Look," I said. "We have one thing in common with the Eoti whom we're fighting. Insects and warm-blooded animals differ amazingly. But only among the community-building insects and the community-building men are there individuals who, while taking no part personally in the reproductive chain, are of fundamental importance to their species. For example, you might have a female nursery-school-teacher who is barren, but who is of unquestionable value in shaping the personalities and even physiques of children in her care."

"Fourth Orientation Lecture for Soldier Surrogates," Weinstein said in a dry voice. "He got it right out of the book."

"I've been wounded," I said. "I've been seriously wounded fifteen times." I stood before them and began rolling up my right sleeve. It was soaked with my perspiration.

"WE can tell you've been wounded, Commander," Lamehd pointed out uncertainly. "We can tell from your medals. You don't have to—"

"And every time I was wounded, they repaired me good as new.

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Better. Look at that arm." I flexed it for them. "Before it was burned off in a small razzle six years ago, I could never build up a muscle that big. It's a better arm that they built on the stump and, believe me, my reflexes never had it so good."

"What did you mean," Wang Hsi started to ask me, "when you said before—"

"Fifteen times I was wounded," my voice drowned him out, "and fourteen times the wound was repaired. The fifteenth time — *the fifteenth time*—well, the fifteenth time it wasn't a wound they could repair. They couldn't help me one bit the fifteenth time."

Roger Grey opened his mouth.

"Fortunately," I whispered, "it wasn't a wound that showed."

Weinstein started to ask me something, decided against it and sat back. But I had told him what he wanted to know.

"A nucleonic howitzer. The way it was figured later, it had been a defective shell. Bad enough to kill half the men on our second-class cruiser. I wasn't killed, but I was in range of the backblast."

"That backblast." Lamehd was thinking aloud. "That backblast will sterilize anybody within two hundred feet, unless he's wearing—"

"And I wasn't." I had stopped sweating. It was over. My crazy little precious secret was out. I took a deep breath. "So you see — well, anyway, I *know* they haven't solved that problem yet."

Roger Grey stood up and said, "Hey!" He held out his hand. I shook it. It felt like any normal guy's hand. Stronger, maybe.

"Slingshot personnel," I went on, "are all volunteers. Except for two categories — the commanders and soldier surrogates."

"Figuring, I guess," Weinstein asked, "that the human race can spare them most easily?"

"Right," I said. "Figuring that the human race can spare them most easily."

He nodded.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Yussuf Lamehd laughed as he got up and shook my hand too. "Welcome to our city."

"Thanks," I said, "*son*."

HE seemed puzzled at the emphasis.

"That's the rest of it," I explained. "Never got married and was too busy getting drunk and tearing up the pavement on my leaves to visit a sperm bank."

"Oho," Weinstein said, and gestured at the walls with a thick thumb. "So this is it."

"That's right — this is it — the Family. The only one I'll ever have. I've got almost enough of these—" I tapped my medals —"to rate replacement. As a

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slingshot commander, I'm sure of it."

"All you don't know yet," Lamehd pointed out, "is how high a percentage of replacement will be apportioned to your memory. That depends on how many more of those chest decorations you collect before you become an — ah, should I say *raw material?*"

"Yeah," I said, feeling crazily light and easy and relaxed. I'd gotten it all out, and I didn't feel whipped any more by a billion years of reproduction and evolution.

And *I'd* started out to do a morale job on *them!*

"Well, boys," Lamehd said, "it seems to me we want the commander to get a lot more fruit salad. He's a nice guy, and there should be more of him in the club."

They were all standing around me now — Weinstein, Lamehd, Grey, Wang Hsi. They looked real friendly and real capable. I began to feel we were going to have one of the best slingshots in . . . what did I mean, *one* of the best? The *best*, mister, *the* best.

"Okay," said Grey. "Wherever and whenever you want to, you start leading us — *Pop.*"

—WILLIAM TENN

FORECAST

Next month, the second installment of GLADIATOR AT LAW by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth builds up a real shock wave as it buzzes the glistening bubble houses and ugly Belly Rave shacks of this conflict-filled future. Charles Mundin, a freshman lawyer with a hopeless career, has taken on an equally hopeless case . . . fighting the biggest, most powerful corporation in the history of mankind. But he has one advantage; he doesn't know when a problem just can't be solved. And just wait till you see what has happened to the New York Stock Exchange!

Clifford D. Simak returns with GREEN THUMB, a tender, sensitive, completely baffling novelet in which someone—or something—neatly removes a deep cone of soil from a farmer's land and leaves a tidy pile of sand beside the bewildering crater. That, of course, is where the story starts. Where it winds up . . . well, you may find that the title has stuck to you!

Another novelet? Very likely.

Short stories? Absolutely.

Features? To be sure.

And you'll notice that Willy Ley's FOR YOUR INFORMATION this month answers a whole science class in Kansas with a beautifully organized survey of nature's giants that you'll want to keep handy for reference. In the next issue, he will give you a closeup of Mars! Don't miss it.

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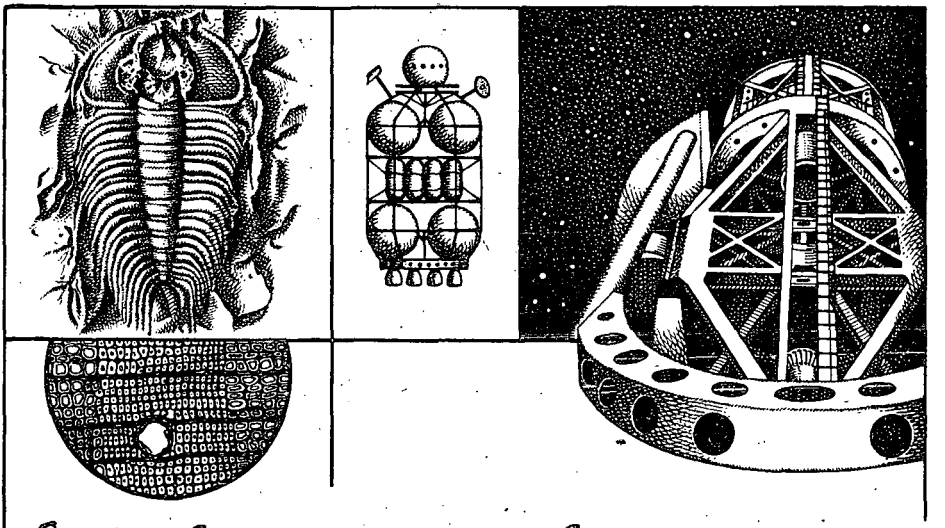
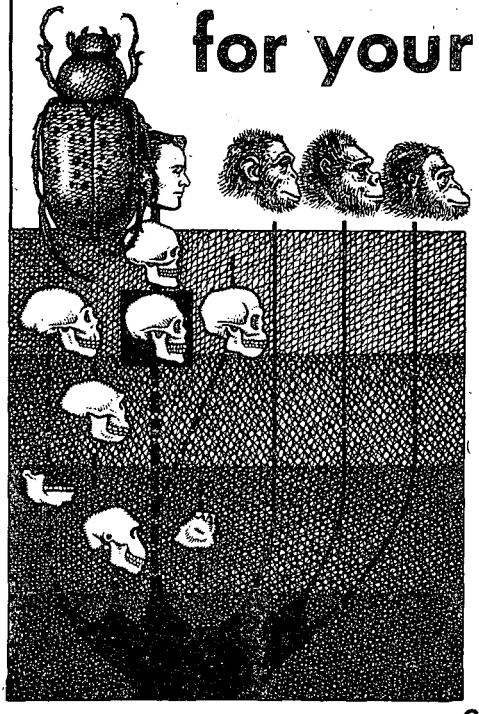


for your information

By WILLY LEY



LARGEST OF THEIR KIND

SOME time ago, I received a letter, not from an individual but from a whole high-school class in Kansas, asking for an article on the question of which mammal, bird, reptile, fish and so forth is the largest in its class, past or present. When I started looking things up, I began to realize—as you will in a little while—that Kansas was as logical a place as Hollywood to

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ask this particular question. Kansas may not have any extremely large animals to offer at this moment, but it certainly is a state with a gigantic past!

To begin somewhere, let's start at the top, with the mammals. The largest land mammal of the present period is, by a comfortable margin, *Loxodon africanus,* the African elephant. An old bull will stand 11 feet tall and reach a weight of from six to eight tons. If one can put full trust in the reports of big-game hunters, bulls standing 11½ feet tall have been shot in Africa, but I'd feel much happier about these reports if the trophy had ended up in some museum where a measurement can be repeated in case of doubt. At any event, the African elephant is, on the average, half a foot taller and a ton heavier than the nearest runner-up, which is, of course, *Elephas indicus,* the Indian elephant.

IN the not-too-remote past, however, it would have been the African elephant who would have been designated as runner-up. No, *not* to the mammoth—at least not to the Siberian mammoth, which was smaller than the Indian elephant. But one European variety of mammoth, found in Austria and now on exhibition in the Natural History Museum of Stuttgart, topped the African elephant by 30 inches, and another variety of extinct elephant, *Elephas trogontherii,* found in southwest Germany near Wiesbaden, topped this giant by another 10 inches.

Even this super-elephant, though, was not the largest land mammal of the past. The record, as far as present knowledge goes, is held by *Baluchitherium grangeri,* a "hornless rhinoceros" from the Tertiary period of southern Asia, which was 27 feet long and stood around 18 feet tall. The present Indian rhinoceros could have walked under a standing Baluchitherium without ducking.

But mammals do not live on land only. The marine mammals of today hold the record not only over the land or marine mammals of the past, but also over everything else that ever moved, including the dinosaurs.

The largest whale is probably the kind called the Blue Rorqual, *Balaenoptera sibbaldii* (or *B. musculus*). Even conservative naturalists grant this monster a body length of 80 to 85 feet. (Statements that can be found in print go as high as 101 feet.) The weight of a fully grown specimen of this whale is estimated to be close to 150 tons. Even if this should be wrong by a couple of dozen tons or so, the large whales of today are considerably heavier than brontosaurus, which is cal-

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culated to have weighed in at 38 tons on the hoof. The whales of the geological past, being far smaller than those of the present, would take at best fourth or fifth place.

Proceeding to the birds, one at once gets into the dilemma of what to go by, linear dimensions or weight. The bird with the largest wing-spread of the present time is the Wandering Albatross, the *albatros errante* of the South Americans or *Diomedea exulans* of the ornithologists. The largest ever measured had a wing-spread of 12 feet and weighed 15 pounds. The condor, both South American and Californian, comes close with a maximum spread of just about 11 feet, but it weighs as much as 31 pounds. In the recent past, there was an even larger California condor that topped the wing-spread of the albatross and was probably heavier, too, than the existing type.

Naturally, the flightless birds are the biggest, for ground installations always weigh more than airborne equipment. The largest of today, the African ostrich, may look down at you from a height of eight feet and weigh 160 pounds.

ONLY a few centuries ago, however, the African ostrich would have been runner-up to several other bird giants.

The biggest of the New Zealand moas, *Dinornis maximus,* was not a lot taller (probably just a matter of inches), but must have weighed more than twice as much. This moa was certainly still alive in 1600, the date for which the giant ostrichlike bird of Madagascar is mentioned as still living, though only by hearsay, not from personal observation of the reporter.

The Madagascar bird, *Aepyornis ingens,* stood 10 feet tall. It was of lighter build than *Dinornis,* but it did lay the biggest bird egg known to science—almost 14 inches long, with a cubic content equal to that of 7 ostrich eggs or 185 eggs of the kind that come by the dozen.

The largest—or, rather, most massive—of extinct birds well known to paleontologists was *Diatryma gigantea,* from the lower Eocene of Wyoming. This heavy bird, possibly related to the cranes of today, had a skull almost 20 inches long, with a beak to match. Some seven feet tall when standing erect, it must have weighed well over 300 pounds.

We now come to the reptiles and there, as everybody knows, the past greatly outshines the present. But the present is not doing as badly as most people think.

The large Indian crocodile, *Crocodilus porosus,* which shows

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a most remarkable preference for salt water and long swims in the ocean, would not look too much out of place in a Cretaceous landscape. One specimen, of which the skull is in the British Museum, has been measured by Boulenger and found to be 33 feet long, with a circumference of 13 feet 8 inches!

The largest living turtle is a hefty animal, too. It is the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys*) of the high seas, which grows to an overall length of nine feet, the carapace measuring 6½ feet, and the weight of such a giant is an authenticated 1450 pounds.

The largest living snake is the South American anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*), of which many a wild tale has been told. Zoologists usually say that this snake will reach a length of "well over 20 feet" and generally will be willing to settle for 25 feet as the limit. But one reputable source mentions a specimen that measured 30 feet. However, it was measured after death (understandably so) and if you stretch a dead snake of such length for measuring, you may add one or two feet to its "live length" without meaning to.

The largest lizardlike reptiles of today are, of course, the monitors. The East Indian *Varanus salvator* grows to a length of 10 feet, while the still larger *Varanus komodoensis*, from the small island of Komodo in the Sunda Sea, is two or three or maybe even four feet longer. Both are very long-tailed, so that these figures are slightly misleading. The heaviest Komodo monitor actually weighed was just about 100 pounds.

ALTHOUGH all these are respectable figures, they shrink by comparison with reptiles from former geological periods. The one exception is the Indian crocodile. I don't know of any extinct true crocodile that grew as big. But the monitors are just small leftovers. Only some 20,000 years ago, Australia had a monitor lizard that was more than 20 feet long and may have reached 30 feet.

The largest extinct reptiles were the sauropod dinosaurs of the type of the well-known brontosaurus. Diplodocus was probably the longest because of an elongated tail; measurements lie between 70 and 75 feet from nose to tip of the tail. Not longer, but more massive by far, and probably the heaviest of the dinosaurs was *Brachiosaurus brancai* from the Upper Jurassic period of East Africa. The length of the humerus (bone of the upper arm) of Brachiosaurus is 84 inches, as compared to 47¼ inches for the same bone in Diplodocus. Brach-

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Brachiosaurus Brancai
Upper Jurassic of East Africa

iosaurus could still breathe while walking along the bottom of a 40-foot-deep lake!

The largest leatherback turtle would also look quite small next to *Archelon ischyros,* from the Upper Cretaceous of Kansas. This marine turtle of some 60 million years ago must have been 13½ feet long when alive and heavy in proportion, presumably around 3500 pounds. Its armor had been somewhat reduced for the sake of mobility, but there is little need for armor in a turtle with a three-foot skull and a beak like a guillotine.

For company, *Archelon* had 20-foot mosasaurs, swimming reptiles with four big paddles, a flat tail and long teeth.

Above the waters where Archelon and the mosasaurs competed for fish, the largest flying animal of all Earth's history wheeled on leathery wings, also looking for fish. This was *Pteranodon ingens* —mostly wings, with a ridiculously small body and legs, but with a large though paper-thin skull and a long sharp beak. The wing-spread of Specimen No. 2514 has been computed at 26 feet 9 inches.

The amphibians of today are generally small. A 10-inch salamander is "big" and a two-pound toad something worth mentioning. Still, in Japan there lives a salamander, called Hanzaki and Hazekoi by the Japanese, which grows to slightly over five feet in length. This is *Megalobatrachus maximus,* the Japanese giant salamander that was discovered about 1825 by the German traveler von Siebold and caused a small sensation in scientific circles in its time—not only because it is the largest living amphibian, but also because it was the first case of an animal having been known in fossil form before being discovered alive.

To find really large amphibians

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in the geologic past, we have to go back to before the dinosaurs to encounter the labyrinthodons, so named because of the strange construction of their teeth. One especially familiar but exceptionally badly named species was *Mastodonsaurus acuminatus,* from the Triassic of northern Europe, with a three-foot skull and an overall length of about 12 feet.

THE fishes are another class where the present holds its own well as compared to the past, even though it has to be admitted that the record-holders belong to an ancient type — namely, the sharks. The basking shark (*Selache maxima*) is known to reach a length of 30 to 35 feet, while the whale shark (*Rhineodon typus*), recently made famous by Thor Heyerdahl and his Kon-Tiki expedition, is well established with 45-foot specimens, and even 60 feet has been tentatively accepted as a possible maximum size.

Past geological periods have not yet furnished anything larger than the whale shark among the extinct fishes. A possible exception is a fossil shark called *Carcharodon megalodon,* from the Miocene of the Vienna area. Only the teeth are known so far, and if the size of the shark was in proportion to the size of these teeth, it might have been larger than *Rhineodon.*

Now don't dismiss the invertebrates as tiny. True, they usually are, for a one-inch beetle will be considered a big fellow and a six-inch earthworm "enormous" and the African snail *Achatina fulica,* which the Japanese spread over a large number of Pacific islands as a food supply during the Second World War, is known as the "giant snail." Its shell is five inches long and its overall length nine inches; it is the second largest of the land snails of our era. (The largest, also African, is about a foot long.) But there are a number of other impressive exceptions from the rule that most invertebrates are small.

The largest clam of our time—and of the past, too, as far as is known—is *Tridacna gigas,* which occurs near the Philippines, on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia and generally in that area. It can reach a size of five feet and a weight of 500 pounds. Its virtually indestructible shells were brought to Europe for centuries and were often used as basins for holy water in small churches, especially in Bavaria and Austria. "Two-thirds of my class should make excellent naturalists; they have been baptized from Tridacna shells," a south German zoology instructor once said to me.

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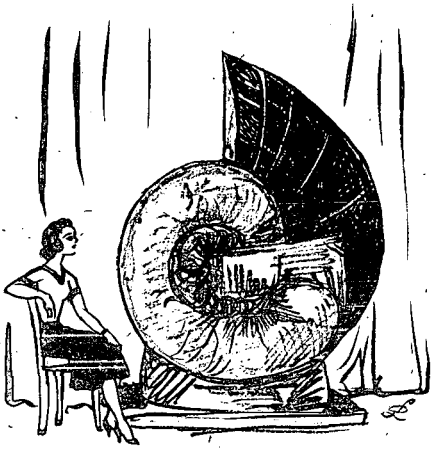
The largest molluscs are the giant squid, the *Kraken* of the Norse, but unfortunately nobody can give any definite figures. One killed by the crew of the French corvette *Alecton* in 1861 could not be actually measured, since the crew of the ship, although they tried hard, failed to hoist it aboard. But the monster was directly alongside the ship, so that a good and reliable estimate could be made—50 *feet without the tentacles!*

No giant fossils of a comparable type are known, but armorless octopi would hardly fossilize. They would be eaten by a large variety of marine creatures before mud or sand could cover the body. However, some octopi produce shells the way the living nautilus does and such shells fossilize easily. You can see long rows of these *ammonites* in every museum.

The largest known is, so to speak, a childhood friend of mine. "I knew him well," of course, long after its discovery. The enormous thing was found in a quarry at a place named Seppenrade in Westphalia in 1895. Since *pachys* (Greek) means "thick," it was promptly christened *Pachydiscus seppenradensis*. The diameter of the shell is 8¼ feet. The weight of the fossil, more precisely a *steinkern* or internal mold, is 7700 pounds. And the octopus



Pachydiscus seppenradensis
Upper Cretaceous, West Germany

that grew it lived during the Upper Cretaceous period.

EVEN something as unlikely to be gigantic as a jellyfish can grow to enormous size. At Nahant, Mass., Prof. Louis Agassiz measured one in which the bell was 7½ feet across and the tentacles more than 120 feet long! In the southern Pacific, one kind seems to grow to a diameter (without tentacles) of three to four feet as a rule. At that size, it weighs about 90 pounds.

A twelve-foot earthworm may sound as unlikely as a 90-pound jellyfish, but such earthworms exist in Australia. They have as many as 500 segments and are

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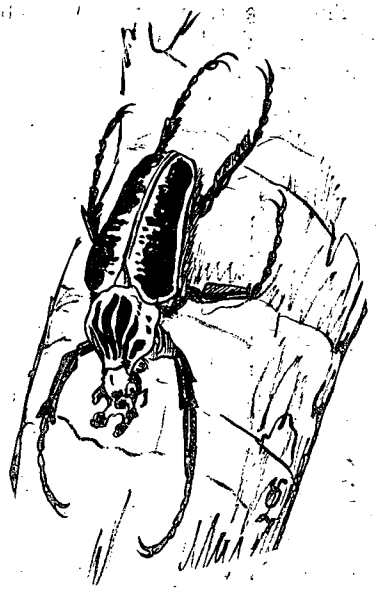
fairly thin when extended, about ½ inch. The handbook I consulted states that the only bird known to eat these earthworms is the Australian laughing kingfisher. I can add one other—I saw a photograph of a domestic duck swallowing hard but successfully. Yet this is not the longest worm by any means. The "broad fish tapeworm" will reach a length of 60 feet, with a width of ¾ inches! But a parasite is obviously a special case.

When it comes to insects, one has to ask, of course, "what kind?" The largest living butterfly is a moth and so are the runners-up. The record is held by the South American owl moth with a span of 11 inches. The south Asiatic Atlas moth measures 10 inches in wing-spread, but has much wider wings than the owl moth. Our North American species do not compare too badly, the cecropia moth reaching 7½ and the polyphemus moth 6½ inches.

Among the beetles, the elephant beetles of South America and the goliath beetles of Central Africa run in very close competition, both being four inches long in good specimens. The hercules beetles of tropical America measure up to 6½ inches in length, but much of this is just the long projecting horn. In actual length, a "walking stick" from Borneo probably wins with 11 inches, but it is quite thin.



Central African Goliath Beetle
(Goliathus regius)

How about the insects of the past? In the far remote past, the Carboniferous period, insects like dragonflies were the largest. The biggest present-day dragonflies, from tropical America and Borneo, span between 6½ and 7 inches maximum. *Titanophasma,* from the Carboniferous of Europe, had a wing-span of 18 inches. For quite some time, it was thought to be the largest, but then *Protodonata* with a 2½-foot spread was found in the Permian of Kansas.

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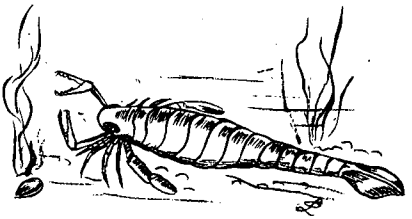
CRUSTACEANS and, in general, arthropods still have to be mentioned. When the New England coast was first reached, stories of lobsters of incredible size went back to Europe. One famous natural history book of the sixteenth century, by the municipal physician of Zurich, Dr. Konrad Gesner, even contains a picture of a 6-foot lobster eating a man. Gesner stated that this is what he had been told, but neither he nor his artist had seen a lobster of such size.

The fact is that the American lobster runs larger than the European lobster and that old specimens reach considerable size. The largest really established measured 23¾ inches and weighed 34 pounds.

In sheer size, a spider crab from the Japan Sea, *Macraucheira kaempfferi,* surpasses this lobster, since it stilts along over the ocean floor on legs spanning six feet. Its body, though, is not much larger than a fist.

The largest arthropod known became extinct some 450 million years ago. It thrived during the Silurian period and is known to science as *Pterygotus.* The overall length was nine feet; it belonged to a completely extinct group called the eurypterids. We don't know whether they lived in fresh water or salt water. But they were obviously carnivorous and the terror of anything smaller that happened to come within reach.



Pterygotus from the Silurian Period

And there you have a condensed record of the giants of the past and present. Incidentally, Man rightfully belongs on this list. Despite those who insist on viewing him as small and puny, he actually is a member in good standing of the one per cent or less of the Earth's total life population that can be called giants! Figure it out for yourself — he averages 5½ feet in height and 130 pounds (extremes are 8½ feet and 600 pounds) with an arm-spread of 5 to 8 feet. What's small about that?

I'm sorry that this survey squeezed out the letter section this month. It will be back in next month's department—which will be astronomical all the way through because of the close approach of Mars at the end of June.

—WILLY LEY

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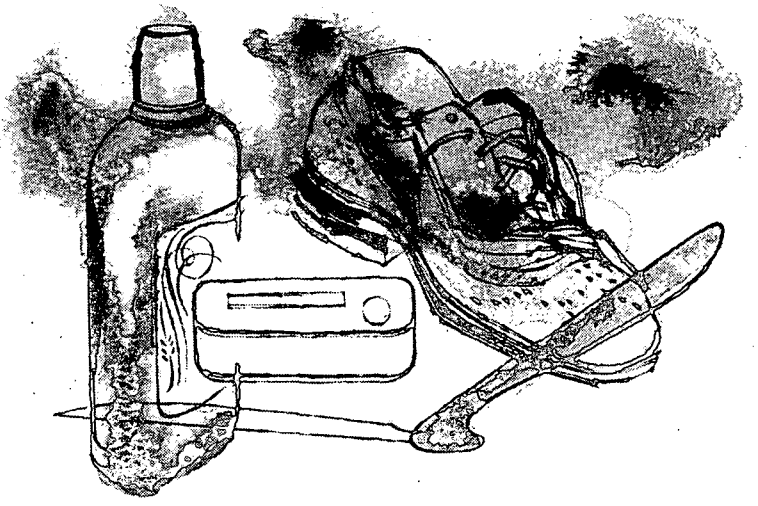

Illustrated by ASHMAN

SEE?

By EDWARD G. ROBLES, JR.

Seeing things? Don't go to an analyst—see the Commission—if it doesn't find you first!

WELL, there was this song a few years back. You know the one. Phil Harris singing about a thing that you couldn't get rid of, no matter what you did, a thing so repulsive it made you a social outcast. Never thought I'd see one, though. Dirty Pete found it.

Don't rush me. I'll tell you about it.

We're hobos, understand? Now

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a hobo is a different breed of cat than you think. Oh, people are getting educated to the idea that a hobo will work and move on, whereas a tramp will mooch and move on, and a bum will mooch and hang around, but you still find folks who are ignorant enough to call us bums.

We're aristocrats, yes sir. If it wasn't for us, you wouldn't enjoy half the little luxuries you do. Oh, don't believe me—talk to your experts. They know that, without the migratory worker, most of the crops wouldn't get harvested. And, if I talk high-falutin' once in a while, don't blame me. Associating with the Professor improves any man's vocabulary, in spite of themselves.

THERE was the four of us, see? We'd been kicking around together for longer than I care to think about. There was the Professor and Dirty Pete and Sacks and Eddie. I'm Eddie. Nicknames are funny things. Take the Professor — he was a real professor once, until he began hitting the bottle. Well, he lost his job, his home, his family, and his rep.

One morning, he wakes up on Skid Row without a nickel in his jeans and the great-granddaddy of all hangovers. He comes to a decision. Either he could make a man out of hisself, or he could die. Right then, dying looked like the easiest thing to do, but it took more guts that he had to jump off a bridge, so he went on the Road instead.

After he got over his shakes —and he sure had 'em bad—he decided that, if he never took another drink, it'd be the best thing for him. So he didn't. He had a kind of dignity, though, and he could really talk, so he and I teamed up during the wheat harvest in South Dakota. We made all the stops and, when we hit the peaches in California we picked up Sacks and Dirty Pete.

Sacks got his monicker because he never wore shoes. He claimed that gunny-sacks, wrapped around his feet and shins, gave as much protection and more freedom, and they were more comfortable, besides costing nix. Since we mostly bought our shoes at the dumps, at four bits a pair, you might say he was stretching a point, but that's one of the laws of the Road. You don't step on the other guy's corns, and he don't step on yours.

So guess why Dirty Pete was called that. Yeah. He hadn't taken a bath since 'forty-six, when he got out of the army, and he didn't figger on ever takin' another. He was a damn' good worker, though, and nobody'd

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ever try anything with him around. He wasn't any bigger than a Mack truck. Besides, he was quiet.

Oh, sure. You wanna know why I'm on the Road. Well, it happens I like whiskers. Trouble is, they're not fashionable, unless you're some kind of an artist, which I'm not. You know, social disapproval. I didn't have the guts to face it, so I lit out. Nobody cares on the Road what you do, so I was okay with my belt-length beard.

A beard's an enjoyable thing, too. There's a certain kind of thrill you get from stroking it, and feeling its silkiness run through your fingers. And besides, combing it, and keeping it free of burrs, snarls and tangles, sort of keeps your spare moments so full that the devil don't find any idle time to put your hands to work in. If you ask me, I think that the razor has been the downfall of society. And I'm willing to bet I have plenty of company with the same opinion.

Show me a man who doesn't let his beard grow once in a while, even if it's only for a day or so, and you've shown me a man who thinks more of social pressure than he does of his own comfort. And show me a man who says he likes to shave, and you've shown me a man who is either a liar or is asking for punishment.

THAT'S enough about us. Now to get on with the story. You know, if the Professor hadn't been around, there would probably have been murder done over the Thing, or at least our little group would've split up, 'cause none of us had the brains to figure it out.

Pete's an expert scrounger. His eyes are sharp, and he's always on the lookout for a salable piece of goods, even if he can only get a nickel for it. One night, we're sitting in a jungle near Sacramento, trying to figure out whether to go north for the grapes, or south for the grapes. They're all over California, you know, and they pay pretty well.

Pete, as usual, is out looking, and pretty soon he comes back into camp with this thing in his hand. He handles it like it was hot, but he's pleased he's found it, because he hopes to merchandise it. So he walks up to me, and says, "Hey, Eddie. What'll you gimme for this, huh?"

I say, "Get that to hell away from me! I'll give you a swift kick in the pants if you don't."

He looks real surprised. He says, "Huh, I thought maybe you could use it."

I get up on my feet. I say, real low and careful, because maybe he's joking, "Look, Pete — you oughtta know by this time, I *like* my beard. Now will you go away?"

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He mooches off, looking like I'd kicked him, and goes over to the Professor. I figure maybe the Professor could use it, so I listen. The Prof looks like he was being offered a live rattlesnake.

"No, thanks, really, Pete. I have resolved never to touch it again. I hope you don't mind."

Well, for some reason Pete don't look pleased, and he's real unhappy by this time, but he tries again.

"Hey, Sacks, what'll you gimme for—"

He don't get a chance to finish. I'm only listening with half an ear, but I'm so surprised I stand up like I been stuck with a pin. Sacks says, "Whatinell would I do with a left shoe? You know I don't use 'em."

Pete looks at the thing in his hand, and the Prof and I go over there.

The Professor looks at the thing real carefully and speaks up. "Say, Pete, look at that thing and tell me what it is."

"Why, it's a brand new bar of soap, of course. I don't use it, but one of you might want to. What's all the beef about?"

"Soap?" I say. "Why, you poor fish, something must have happened to your eyes. When you offered me that straight razor, I thought you'd gone off your nut. Now I *know* it."

The Professor interrupts. He looks excited. "Wait a minute, Eddie. To me that item looks exactly like a full fifth of Old Harvester, 100 proof. Used to be my favorite, before I became an abstainer. To Pete, it looks like soap. To you, it looks like a straight razor while, to Sacks, it resembles a shoe. Does that give you any ideas?"

"Means we're all having hallucinations," I grunts.

"Exactly. Pete, was there anything else in the location where you found this thing?"

"Nothing but some scrap tin."

"Show us."

SO, the four of us wanders across the field and, sure enough, there was this silly looking object lying there. It was about eighteen or twenty feet across, and two feet thick, and I nearly made a fool of myself. I almost screamed when I saw six straight razors *crawling* out of a hole in its side.

The Professor whistled. "Grab them, boys. We want them."

Well, Sacks sacrifices one of his sacks, and we rounded up fifteen of the useless things. We went back to the jungle, where the Prof explained it.

"Look, fellows, suppose you were a being from another planet that wanted to take over here. Suppose, further, that you were rather small and relatively de-

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fenseless. To finish the suppositions, suppose you were a positive telepath, with not only the ability to read minds, but also the ability to create visual and tactile hallucinations. How would you protect yourself?"

A light began to dawn, but I didn't say a word about it.

The Professor continued. "If you could do all this, you'd make yourself look just as useless as possible. To Pete, you'd look like a bar of soap, because he never uses the stuff. To Sacks, you'd look like a shoe, because his dislike for shoes is evident in his mind. To Eddie, who is proud of his beard, you'd look like a razor, while to me, you'd look like a bottle of booze, because I dislike its effects intensely. In other words, you would assume an imposture that would assure you'd never be picked up, except by someone like Pete, who would see in you a salable item, even though not a usable one. It may be, Pete, that you have saved the world."

So, that's the story. We're all still on the Road, of course, but now we are the "Commission for the Investigation of Extraterrestrial Invasion." Congress named us as that, when we got the data to them.

Now, Mr. Mayor, you see our problem. Have your citizens seen anything around that they don't want? If they have, we want to look at it.

—EDWARD G. ROBLES, JR.

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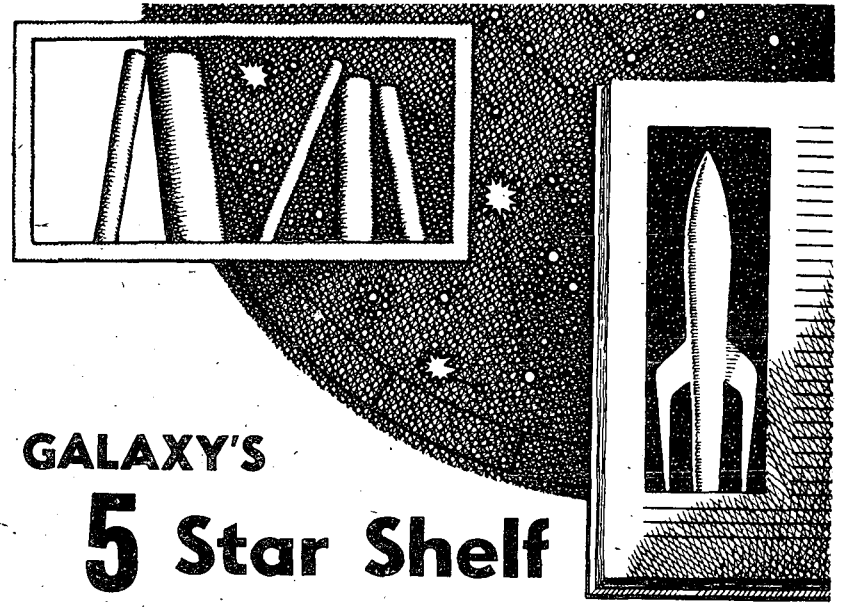

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

NEW WORLD OF THE MIND by J. B. Rhine. William Sloane Associates, $3.75

I CAME to this book—my first flyer into Rhine's parapsychological work—with enthusiasm and high curiosity. I put it down bothered, bewildered and depressed. Bothered by the thin evidence on which Dr. Rhine bases his claims, bewildered by the enormousness of those claims, and depressed by what I felt was an unnecessary attack on the natural sciences for their refusal to accept the evidence without question.

The statistical evidence for clairvoyance, psychokinesis and precognition can be accepted, though one can doubt that statistical mathematics has reached a point of infallibility that makes it impossible for the methodology to be in error.

But I think we know far too little about the interactions of brain, ductless glands, nervous system and other somatic elements that influence personality to permit us to throw the possibility of a scientific explanation of parapsychology out of the window and revert forthwith to the ancient mystic dualism that

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presupposes the existence of Mind separate from and independent of Brain. This is what Dr. Rhine does in his book.

He argues that, since he cannot measure "psi energy" with a voltmeter, so to speak, it cannot be a property or function of matter-energy relations, but rather is a proof of the existence of the soul. To me, this is an unscientific argument. There are many things our instruments are incapable of measuring.

Why not consider them spiritual phenomena, too?

The book should be read by anyone interested in learning what actually is known about parapsychology, but its conclusions should be taken with a carload of rock salt.

A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS by Edgar Pangborn. Doubleday & Co., $2.95

IT'S a pity that this beautiful and moving book has to be labeled science fiction, for it could show a much wider audience what is being done in this field—those, mainly, who are prejudiced by poor S-F films and memories of ghastly old stories read in their youth.

Primarily, it is a study in the faltering ethics of Man: ethics which are fine in principle, but too often ignored in practice. Secondarily, it is a good story—though in many ways more like a preliminary sketch of a much larger-scope novel than it actually is.

The tale tells of the conflict between Observers and Abdicators, two groups of Martians living in four underground cities on Earth, for the soul of mankind. The Abdicators want Man to destroy himself; the Observers want to help him find his way to maturity. Both fail—the Abdicators completely, the Observers partially. The ending of the book is thus inconclusive, as it should be in any serious imagination of mankind's future.

Despite the bigness of the theme, the story is told in little details which make the tragedy all the more impressive. It is a distinguished job, even though incompletely developed.

TOMORROW'S UNIVERSE, edited by H. J. Campbell. Panther Books, London, England. Available from Stephen's Book Service, 45 Astor Place, New York, N. Y., $2.50

EVEN the British are doing original anthologies of American science fiction! A shame that this one is not particularly worthwhile.

Kris Neville, Chad Oliver and T. D. Hamm have entries that

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rate reading; the other five tales are all in that portentous, fruity style the British seem to like—except one by Sprague de Camp, which is a passably amusing space opus.

This is not one of science fiction's Basic Books.

SEARCH THE SKY by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth. Ballantine Books, $2.50 and 35¢ (paper)

THOUGH not quite up to the authors' previous *Space Merchants,* this new one is a colorful and pointed melodrama of the decay of Man's interstellar empire. Planetary civilizations have become frozen into genetic patterns that are leading them toward race suicide.

Protagonist Ross sets out from Halsey's Planet to find what has happened to certain civilizations that have faded out of communication. After a variety of adventures, Ross, with three other people whom he has picked up during his travels, reaches Earth, where he finds a civilization exactly like that in Kornbluth's "The Marching Morons" (GALAXY, April 1951).

Here, however, he also finds the solution to the bitter dilemma into which the whole of mankind has worked itself. I think you'll like it. I did.

BORN LEADER by J. T. McIntosh. Doubleday & Co., $2.95

WHERE Pohl and Kornbluth survey the terrifying effects of genetic inbreeding, McIntosh (ex-M'Intosh) here examines the results of social inbreeding.

There are two small colonies on two planets of a sun 14 light-years from a dying Earth. One is imbued with the principles of co-operation and a compulsion never to mention, much less use, atomic energy. This group develops into an idyllic and practically stagnant society.

The other is militarist. It attempts to conquer the first. And in the ensuing conflict, the problem is, of course, which will win? The working out of that problem gives the reader first-rate entertainment on one level, and food for soul-searching thought on another.

TALES FROM GAVAGAN'S BAR by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. Twayne Publishers, $3.00

IT may not please the joint authors too much to hear it said, but I will make a private wager that this volume will be a lot more durable in the race for literary immortality than anything else either of them has written.

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These little whisky fantasies are completely enchanting—wise, mad, fantastic, funny, warmly human and often very moving.

There are 23 items in the book, over half of which have never appeared in any magazine. No matter how practical you may be, you will delight in these blithely improbable vignettes.

THE LIGHTS IN THE SKY ARE STARS by Fredric Brown. E. P. Dutton & Co., $3.00

THIS never-serialized, first-rate novel takes up space flight after the Moon, Mars and Venus have been reached, but before space travel has really been accepted by Earth's populations. It tells of the struggle to obtain financing for a Jupiter rocket.

Its one defect—if it is a defect—is its fast pacing, its spare, almost skeletal style. Brown is telling a story that, for once in science fiction, is concerned more with character than with plot; and the novel of character almost requires rich and subtle development. There is some of this here, but it seems to me not quite enough.

But that is a minor cavil, in a way.

Even as it stands, the book is richly human, exciting, tragic, and, in the long run, inspiringly imaginative.

TODAY'S REVOLUTION IN WEATHER by William J. Baxter. International Economic Research Bureau, $1.00

A RECENT announcement that minimum average winter temperature levels in the New York City area were two degrees higher during the past thirty years than the previous thirty made me feel that I should at least call your attention to this odd, fact-packed but scientifically eccentric book.

It contains an enormous amount of data on recent changes in the world's climate, though so scrambled in presentation that it is hard to arrive at any conclusions.

The Partch drawings are delightful, the price is low, and therefore — despite the book's melodramatic and unscientific approach—I think you may find it worth looking over if you, too, wonder what is happening to the weather.

RIDERS TO THE STARS by Curt Siodmak and Robert Smith. Ballantine Books, $2.50 and 35¢ (paper)

HERE'S another about Man's first trip into space, this one boiling up with more sheer, undiluted excitement than any other I can remember. It's a noveliza-

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tion (by Smith) of a screenplay (by Siodmak) and, though showing signs of haste in preparation, it still packs a terrific wallop.

The plot deals with the preliminaries three guinea pig scientist-pilots go through before rocketing beyond the atmosphere to find out what is ruining other unmanned rockets that try flying into much deeper space, and with the actual flights themselves.

The writing is undistinguished, the technology sketchy, and the characterizations two-dimensional. But the suspense is *terrific!*

PLANET OF LIGHT by Raymond F. Jones. John C. Winston Co., $2

THIS sequel to *Son of the Stars* is just about the best of the Winston science fiction juveniles. Essentially, it is a study of the need for greater human understanding of ethical values, though at the same time it is a rip-roaring adventure tale.

It tells of the experiences of a small delegation (one family, actually) from Earth to a Conference of the Galactic Federation.

The problem: are they delegates or laboratory animals? What they *really* are, in the eyes of the Federation leaders, is not revealed until the very end.

It is fine reading for all ages.

ATTACK FROM ATLANTIS by Lester del Rey. John C. Winston Co., $2

THOUGH not as meaningful as the Jones story, this tale has much the same merits of swift pacing, vivid imagination, real characters and absence of juvenile melodrama. It stands out from most of its watery predecessors as a believable and well-thought-out tale of an undersea civilization.

The title is misleading, incidentally. It really should be *Defense by Atlantis,* since it is our submarine that penetrates their mile-deep regions.

BRIEF NOTES . . . Gnome Press has put three new ones on the market. C. L. Moore's *Shambleau and Others* ($3.00) is a set of seven horror fantasies from *Weird Tales;* Nat Schachner's *Space Lawyer* ($2.75) is space opera out of the bottom drawer of the pre-adult age of science fiction; and Robert E. Howard's *The Coming of Conan* ($3.00) is fourth in a series of "colorful, action-filled" books about an imaginery prehistoric Hyborean civilization.

Sprague de Camp's *The Tritonian Ring* (Twayne, $2.95) is in the Conan tradition in every sense of the word, though better written.

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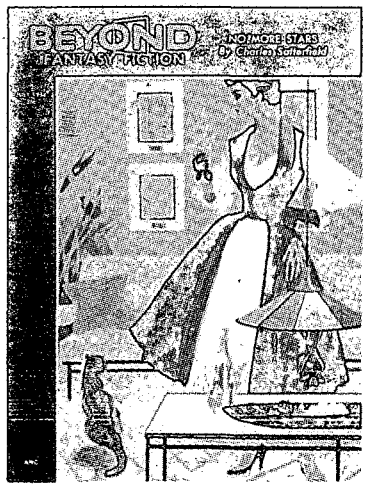
The British Book Center's *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (by Leslie and Adamski; $3.50) strikes me as being completely crackpot—if not actually a hoax. Miss it.

Space Travel by Kenneth W. Gatland and Anthony M. Kunesch (Philosophical Library, $4.75) looks like an excellent though unoriginal summary, on a high level of technical competence, of knowledge on rocket research and allied fields. It will be of special interest to Americans who are interested in British and European researches, since the authors are British scientists with intimate knowledge of the work of the members of International Astronautic Federation, which has members from thirteen countries.

For specialists, Homer E. Newell, Jr., has published *High Altitude Rocket Research* (Academic Press, $7.50), said to be the first book dealing with upper-air research by means of rockets. The author is head of the Rocket-Sonde Research Branch of the Naval Research Laboratory.

—GROFF CONKLIN

ON SALE MAY 25th



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by EVELYN E. SMITH
Miss Tarmity's Profession
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FORGET

By F. L. WALLACE

THE police counselor leaned forward and tapped the small nameplate on his desk, which said: *Val Borgenese*. "That's my name," he said. "Who are you?"

The man across the desk shook his head. "I don't know," he said indistinctly.

"Sometimes a simple approach works," said the counselor, shoving aside the nameplate. "But not often. We haven't found anything that's effective in more than a small percentage of cases." He blinked thoughtfully. "Names are difficult. A name is like clothing, put on or taken off, recognizable but not part of the person—the first thing forgotten and the last remembered."

The man with no name said nothing.

"Try pet names," suggested Borgenese. "You don't have to be sure—just say the first thing you think of. It may be something your parents called you when you were a child."

The man stared vacantly, closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them and mumbled something.

"What?" asked Borgenese.

"Putsy," said the man more distinctly. "The only thing I can think of is Putsy."

The counselor smiled. "That's a pet name, of course, but it doesn't help much. We can't

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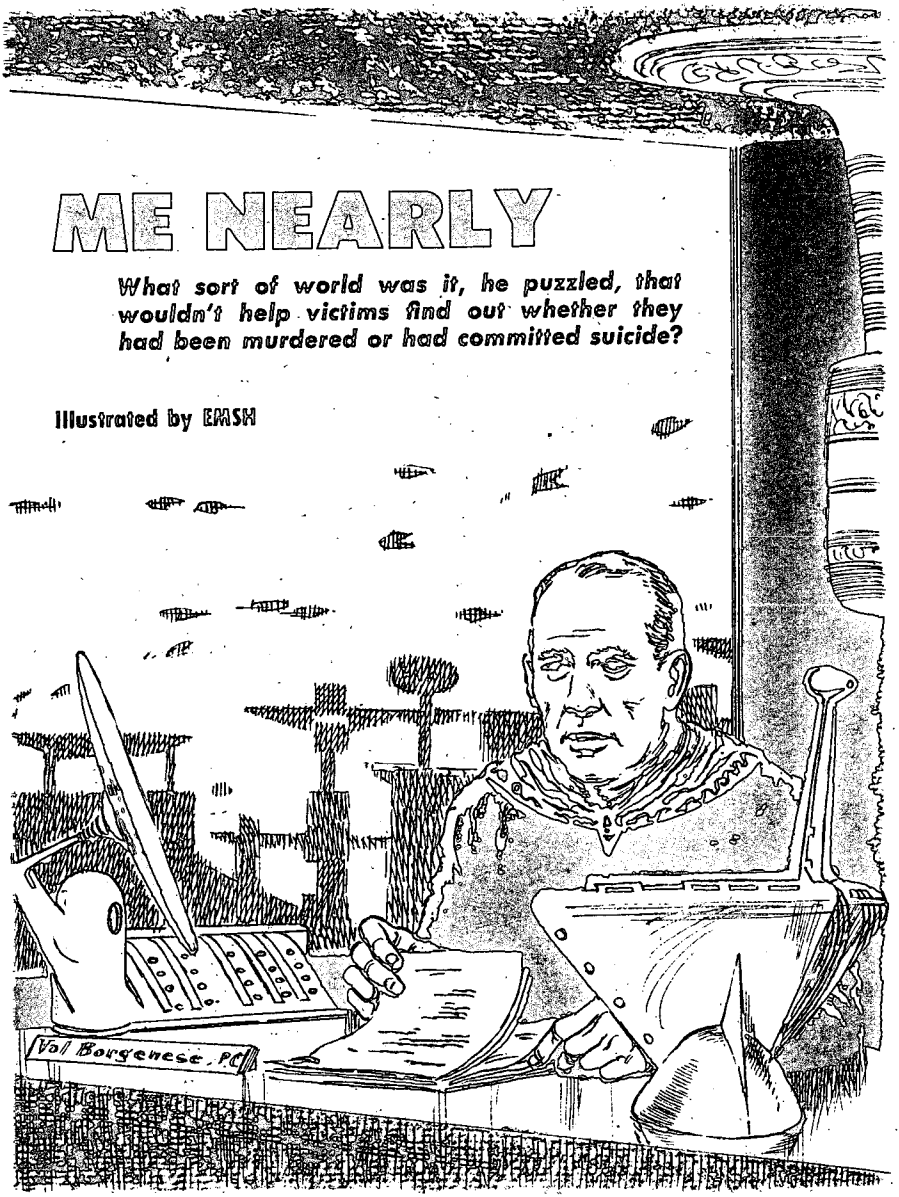
ME NEARLY

What sort of world was it, he puzzled, that wouldn't help victims find out whether they had been murdered or had committed suicide?

Illustrated by EMSH



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trace it, and I don't think you'd want it as a permanent name." He saw the expression on the man's face and added hastily: "We haven't given up, if that's what you're thinking. But it's not easy to determine your identity. The most important source of information is your mind, and that was at the two year level when we found you. The fact that you recalled the word Putsy is an indication."

"Fingerprints," said the man vaguely. "Can't you trace me through fingerprints?"

"That's another clue," said the counselor. "Not fingerprints, but the fact that you thought of them." He jotted something down. "I'll have to check those re-education tapes. They may be defective by now, we've run them so many times. Again, it may be merely that your mind refused to accept the proper information."

The man started to protest, but Borgenese cut him off. "Fingerprints were a fair means of identification in the Twentieth Century, but this is the Twenty-second Century."

THE counselor then sat back. "You're confused now. You have a lot of information you don't know how to use yet. It was given to you fast, and your mind hasn't fully absorbed it and put it in order. Sometimes it helps if you talk out your problems."

"I don't know if I have a problem." The man brushed his hand slowly across his eyes. "Where do I start?"

"Let me do it for you," suggested Borgenese. "You ask questions when you feel like it. It may help you."

He paused, "You were found two weeks ago in the Shelters. You know what those are?"

The man nodded, and Borgenese went on: "Shelter and food for anyone who wants or needs it. Nothing fancy, of course, but no one has to ask or apply; he just walks in and there's a place to sleep and periodically food is provided. It's a favorite place to put people who've been retroed."

The man looked up. "Retroed?"

"Slang," said Borgenese. "The retrogression gun ionizes animal tissue, nerve cells particularly. Aim it at a man's legs and the nerves in that area are drained of energy and his muscles won't hold him up. He falls down.

"Aim it at his head and give him the smallest charge the gun is adjustable to, and his most recent knowledge is subtracted from his memory. Give him the full charge, and he is swept back to a childish or infantile age level. The exact age he reaches is dependent on his physical and men-

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tal condition at the time he's retroed.

"Theoretically it's possible to kill with the retrogression gun. The person can be taken back to a stage where there's not enough nervous organization to sustain the life process.

"However, life is tenacious. As the lower levels are reached, it takes increasing energy to subtract from anything that's left. Most people who want to get rid of someone are satisfied to leave the victim somewhere between the mental ages of one and four. For practical purposes, the man they knew is dead—or retroed, as they say."

"Then that's what they did to me," said the man. "They retroed me and left me in the Shelter. How long was I there?"

BORGENESE shrugged. "Who knows? That's what makes it difficult. A day, or two months. A child of two or three can feed himself, and no record is kept since the place is free. Also, it's cleaned automatically."

"I know that now that you mention it," said the man. "It's just that it's hard to remember."

"You see how it is," said the counselor. "We can't check our files against a date when someone disappeared, because we don't know that date except within very broad limits." He tapped his pen on the desk. "Do you object to a question?"

"Go ahead."

"How many people in the Solar System?"

The man thought with quiet desperation. "Fourteen to sixteen billion."

The counselor was pleased. "That's right. You're beginning to use some of the information we've put back into your mind. Earth, Mars and Venus are the main population centers. But there are also Mercury and the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, as well as the asteroids. We can check to see where you might have come from, but there are so many places and people that you can imagine the results."

"There must be *some* way," the man said painfully. "Pictures, fingerprints, something."

"Something," Borgenese nodded. "But probably not for quite a while. There's another factor, you see. It's a shock, but you've got to face it. And the funny thing is that you'll never be better able to than now."

He rocked back. "Take the average person, full of unsuspected anxiety, even the happiest and most successful. Expose him to the retrogression gun. Tensions and frustrations are drained away.

"The structure of an adult is still there, but it's empty, waiting

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to be filled. Meanwhile the life of the organism goes on, but it's not the same. Lines on the face disappear, the expression alters drastically, new cell growth occurs here and there throughout the body. Do you see what that means?"

The man frowned. "I suppose no one can recognize me."

"That's right. And it's not only your face that changes. You may grow taller, but never shorter. If your hair was gray, it may darken, but not the reverse."

"Then I'm younger too?"

"In a sense, though it's actually not a rejuvenation process at all. The extra tension that everyone carries with him has been removed, and the body merely takes up the slack.

"Generally, the apparent age is made less. A person of middle age or under seems to be three to fifteen years younger than before. You appear to be about twenty-seven, but you may actually be nearer forty. You see, we don't even know what age group to check.

"And it's the same with fingerprints. They've been altered by the retrogression process. Not a great deal, but enough to make identification impossible."

THE nameless man stared around the room—at Val Borgenese, perhaps fifty, calm and pleasant, more of a counselor than a policeman—out of the window at the skyline, and its cleanly defined levels of air traffic.

Where was his place in this?

"I guess it's no use," he said bleakly. "You'll never find out who I am."

The counselor smiled. "I think we will. Directly, there's not much we can do, but there are indirect methods. In the last two weeks we've exposed you to all the organized knowledge that can be put on tapes—physics, chemistry, biology, math, astrogation, the works.

"It's easy to remember what you once knew. It isn't learning; it's actually relearning. One fact put in your mind triggers another into existence. There's a limit, of course, but usually a person comes out of re-education with slightly more formal knowledge than he had in his prior existence." The counselor opened a folder on his desk. "We gave you a number of tests. You didn't know the purpose, but I can tell you the results."

He leafed slowly through the sheets. "You may have been an entrepreneur of some sort. You have an excellent sense of power ethics. Additionally, we've found that you're physically alert, and your reactions are well coordinated. This indicates you may

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have been an athlete or sportsman."

Val Borgenese laid down the tests. "In talking with you, I've learned more. The remark you made about fingerprints suggests you may have been a historian, specializing in the Twentieth Century. No one else is likely to know that there was a time in which fingerprints were a valid means of identification."

"I'm quite a guy, I suppose. Businessman, sportsman, historian." The man smiled bitterly. "All that . . . but I still don't know who I am. And you can't help me."

"Is it important?" asked the counselor softly. "This happens to many people, you know, and some of them do find out who they were, with or without our help. But this is not simple amnesia. No one who's been retroed can resume his former identity. Of course, if we had tapes of the factors which made each person what he is . . ." He shrugged. "But those tapes don't exist. Who knows, really, what caused him to develop as he has? Most of it isn't at the conscious level. At best, if you should learn who you were, you'd have to pick up the thread of your former activities and acquaintances slowly and painfully.

"Maybe it would be better if you start from where you are. You know as much as you once did, and the information is up to date, correct and undistorted. You're younger, in a sense—in better physical condition, not so tense or nervous. Build up from that."

"But I don't have a name."

"Choose one temporarily. You can have it made permanent if it suits you."

THE man was silent, thinking. He looked up, not in despair, but not accepting all that the counselor said either. "What name? All I know is yours, and those of historical figures."

"That's deliberate. We don't put names on tapes, because the effects can be misleading. Everyone has thousands of associations, and can mistake the name of a prominent scientist for his own. Names unconsciously arrived at are usually no help at all."

"What do I do?" the man said. "If I don't know names, how can I choose one?"

"We have a list made up for this purpose. Go through it slowly and consciously. When you come to something you like, take it. If you chance on one that stirs memories, or rather where memories ought to be but aren't, let me know. It may be a lead I can have traced."

The man gazed at the counselor. His thought processes were

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fast, but erratic. He could race along a chain of reasoning and then stumble over a simple fact. The counselor ought to know what he was talking about—this was no isolated occurrence. The police had a lot of experience to justify the treatment they were giving him. Still, he felt they were mistaken in ways he couldn't formulate.

"I'll have to accept it, I suppose," he said. "There's nothing I can do to learn who I was."

The counselor shook his head. "Nothing that *we* can do. The clues are in the structure of your mind, and you have better access to it than we do. Read, think, look. Maybe you'll run across your name. We can take it from there." He paused. "That is, if you're determined to go ahead."

That was a strange thing for a police counselor to say.

"Of course I want to know who I am," he said in surprise. "Why shouldn't I?"

"I'd rather not mention this, but you ought to know." Borgenese shifted uncomfortably. "One third of the lost identity cases that we solve are self-inflicted. In other words, suicides."

HIS head rumbled with names long after he had decided on one and put the list away. Attractive names and odd ones—but which were significant he couldn't say. There was more to living than the knowledge that could be put on tapes and played back. There was more than choosing a name. There was experience, and he lacked it. The world of personal reactions for him had started two weeks previously; it was not enough to help him know what he wanted to do.

He sat down. The room was small but comfortable. As long as he stayed in retro-therapy, he couldn't expect much freedom.

He tried to weigh the factors. He could take a job and adapt himself to some mode of living.

What kind of a job?

He had the ordinary skills of the society—but no outstanding technical ability had been discovered in him. He had the ability of an entrepreneur—but without capital, that outlet was denied him.

His mind and body were empty and waiting. In the next few months, no matter what he did, some of the urge to replace the missing sensations would be satisfied.

The more he thought about that, the more powerfully he felt that he had to know who he was. Otherwise, proceeding to form impressions and opinions might result in a sort of betrayal of himself.

Assume the worst, that he was

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a suicide. Maybe he had knowingly and willingly stepped out of his former life. A suicide would cover himself—would make certain that he could never trace himself back to his dangerous motive for the step. If he lived on Earth, he would go to Mars or Venus to strip himself of his unsatisfactory life. There were dozens of precautions anyone would take.

But if it weren't suicide, then who had retroed him and why? That was a question he couldn't answer now, and didn't need to. When he found out who he was, the motivation might be clear; if it wasn't, at least he would have a basis on which to investigate that.

If someone else had done it to him, deliberately or accidentally, that person would have taken precautions too. The difference was this: as a would-be suicide, he could travel freely to wherever he wished to start over again; while another person would have difficulty enticing him to a faroff place, or, assuming that the actual retrogression had taken place elsewhere, wouldn't find it easy to transport an inert and memoryless body any distance.

So, if he weren't a suicide, there was a good chance that there were clues in this city. He might as well start with that idea—it was all he had to go on.

He was free to stay in retrotherapy indefinitely, but with the restricted freedom he didn't want to. The first step was to get out. He made the decision and felt better. He switched on the screen.

Borgenese looked up. "Hello. Have you decided?"

"I think so."

"Good. Let's have it. It's bound to touch on your former life in some way, though perhaps so remotely we can't trace it. At least, it's something."

"Luis Obispo." He spelled it out.

THE police counselor looked dubious as he wrote the name down. "It's not common, nor uncommon either. The spelling of the first name is a little different, but there must be countless Obispos scattered over the System."

It was curious. Now he almost did think of himself as Luis Obispo. He wanted to be that person. "Another thing," he said. "Did I have any money when I was found?"

"You're thinking of leaving? A lot of them do." Val Borgenese flipped open the folder again. "You did have money, an average amount. It won't set you up in business, if that's what you're thinking."

"I wasn't. How do I get it?"

"I didn't think you were." The

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counselor made another notation. "I'll have the desk release it—you can get it any time. By the way, you get the full amount, no deductions for anything."

The news was welcome, considering what he had ahead of him.

Borgenese was still speaking. "Whatever you do, keep in touch with us. It'll take time to run down this name, and maybe we'll draw a blank. But something significant may show up. If you're serious, and I think you are, it's to your advantage to check back every day or so."

"I'm serious," said Luis. "I'll keep in touch."

There wasn't much to pack. The clothing he wore had been supplied by the police. Ordinary enough; it would pass on the street without comment. It would do until he could afford to get better.

He went down to the desk and picked up his money. It was more than he'd expected—the average man didn't carry this much in his pocket. He wondered about it briefly as he signed the receipt and walked out of retro-therapy. The counselor had said it was an average amount, but it wasn't.

He stood in the street in the dusk trying to orient himself.

Perhaps the money wasn't so puzzling. An average amount for those brought into therapy for treatment, perhaps. Borgenese had said a high proportion were suicides. Such a person would want to start over again minus fears and frustrations, but not completely penniless. If he had money he'd want to take it with him, though not so much that it could be traced, since that would defeat the original purpose.

The pattern was logical—suicides were those with a fair sum of money. This was the fact which inclined Borgenese to the view he obviously held.

Luis Obispo stood there uncertainty. Did he want to find out? His lips thinned—he did. In spite of Borgenese, there were other ways to account for the money he had. One of them was this: he was an important man, accustomed to handling large sums of money.

He started out. He was in a small city of a few hundred thousand on the extreme southern coast of California. In the last few days he'd studied maps of it; he knew where he was going.

WHEN he got there, the Shelters were dark. He didn't know what he had expected, but it wasn't this. Reflection showed him that he hadn't thought about it clearly. The mere existence of Shelters indicated an economic level in which few people would either want or need to make use

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of that which was provided freely.

He skirted the area. He'd been found in one of the Shelters—which one he didn't know. Perhaps he should have checked the record before he came here.

No, this was better. Clues, he was convinced, were almost nonexistent. He had to rely on his body and mind; but not in the ordinary way. He was particularly sensitive to impressions he had received before; the way he had learned things in therapy proved that; but if he tried to force them, he could be led astray. The wisest thing was to react naturally, almost without volition. He should be able to recognize the Shelter he'd been found in without trouble. From that, he could work back.

That was the theory—but it wasn't happening. He circled the area, and there was nothing to which he responded more than vaguely.

He would have to go closer.

He crossed the street. The plan of the Shelters was simple; an area two blocks long and one block wide, heavily planted with shrubs and small trees. In the center was an S-shaped continuous structure divided into a number of small dwelling units.

Luis walked along one wing of the building, turned at the corner and turned again. It was quite dark. He supposed that was why he wasn't reacting to anything. But his senses were sharper than he realized. There was a rustle behind him, and instinctively he flung himself forward, flat on the ground.

A pink spot appeared, low on the wall next to him. It had been aimed at his legs. The paint crackled faintly and the pink spot faded. He rolled away fast.

A dark body loomed past him and dropped where he'd been. There was an exclamation of surprise when the unknown found there was no one there. Luis grunted with satisfaction—this might be only a stickup, but he was getting action faster than he'd expected. He reached out and took hold of a leg and drew the assailant to him. A hard object clipped the side of his head, and he grasped that too.

The shape of the gun was familiar. He tore it loose. This wasn't any stickup! Once was enough to be retrogressed, and he'd had his share. Next time it was going to be the other guy. Physically, he was more than a match for his attacker. He twisted his body and pinned the struggling form to the ground.

That was what it was—a form. A woman, very much so; even in the darkness he was conscious of her body.

Now she was trying to get loose, and he leaned his weight

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more heavily on her. Her clothing was torn—he could feel her flesh against his face. He raised the gun butt, and then changed his mind and instead fumbled for a light. It wasn't easy to find it and still keep her pinned.

"Be quiet or I'll clip you," he growled.

She lay still.

HE found the light and shone it on her face. It was good to look at, that face, but it wasn't at all familiar. He had trouble keeping his eyes from straying. Her dress was torn, and what she wore underneath was torn too.

"Seen enough?" she asked coldly.

"Put that way, I haven't." He couldn't force his voice to be matter-of-fact—it wouldn't behave.

She stared angrily at the light in her eyes. "I knew you'd be back," she said. "I thought I could get you before you got me, but you're too fast." Her mouth trembled. "This time make it permanent. I don't want to be tormented again like this."

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He let her go and sat up. He was trembling, too, but not for the same reason. He turned the light away from her eyes.

"Ever consider that you could be mistaken?" he asked. "You're not the only one it happens to."

She lay there blinking at him, eyes adjusting to the changed light. She fumbled at the torn dress, which wouldn't stay where she put it. "You too?" she said with a vast lack of surprise. "When?"

"They found me here two weeks ago. This is the first time I've come back."

"Patterns," she said. "There are always patterns in what we do." Her attitude toward him had changed drastically, he could see it in her face. "I've been out three weeks longer." She sat up and leaned closer. She didn't seem to be thinking about the same things that had been on her mind only seconds before.

He stood up and helped her to her feet. She was near and showed no inclination to move away. This was something Borgenese hadn't mentioned, and there was nothing in his re-education to prepare him for this sensation, but he liked it. He couldn't see her very well, now that the light was turned off, but she was almost touching him.

"We're in the same situation, I guess." She sighed. "I'm lonely and a little afraid. Come into my place and we'll talk."

He followed her. She turned into a dwelling that from the outside seemed identical to the others. Inside, it wasn't quite the same. He couldn't say in what way it was different, but he didn't think it was the one he'd been found in.

That torn dress bothered him—not that he wanted her to pin it up. The tapes hadn't been very explicit about the beauties of the female body, but he thought he knew what they'd left out.

She was conscious of his gaze and smiled. It was not an invitation, it was a request, and he didn't mind obeying. She slid into his arms and kissed him. He was glad about the limitations of re-education. There were some things a man ought to learn for himself.

She looked up at him. "Maybe you should tell me your name," she said. "Not that it means much in our case."

"Luis Obispo," he said, holding her.

"I had more trouble, I couldn't choose until two days ago." She kissed him again, hard and deliberately. It gave her enough time to jerk the gun out of his pocket.

She slammed it against his ribs. "Stand back," she said, and meant it.

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LUIS stared bewilderedly at her. She was desirable, more than he had imagined and for a variety of reasons. Her emotions had been real, he was sure of that, not feigned for the purpose of taking the gun away. But she had changed again in a fraction of a second. Her face was twisted with an effort at self-control.

"What's the matter?" he asked. He tried to make his voice gentle, but it wouldn't come out that way. The retrogression process had sharpened all his reactions—this one too.

"The name I finally arrived at was—Luise Obispo," she said.

He started. The same as his, except feminine! This was more than he'd dared hope for. A clue—and this girl, who he suddenly realized, without any cynicism about "love at first sight," because the tapes hadn't included it, meant something to him.

"Maybe you're my wife," he said tentatively.

"Don't count on it," she said wearily. "It would have been better if we were strangers—then it wouldn't matter what we did. Now there are too many factors, and I can't choose."

"It has to be," he argued. "Look—the same name, and so close together in time and place, and we were attracted instantly—"

"Go away," she said, and the gun didn't waver. It was not a threat that he could ignore. He left.

She was wrong in making him leave, completely wrong. He couldn't say how he knew, but he was certain. But he couldn't prove it, and she wasn't likely to accept his unsubstantiated word.

He leaned weakly against the door. It was like that. Retrogression had left him with an adult body and sharper receptiveness. And after that followed an urge to live fully. He had a lot of knowledge, but it didn't extend to this sphere of human behavior.

Inside he could hear her moving around faintly, an emotional anticlimax. It wasn't just frustrated sex desire, though that played a part. They had known each other previously—the instant attraction they'd had for each other was proof, leaving aside the names. Lord, he'd trade his unknown identity to have her. He should have taken another name—any other name would have been all right.

It wasn't because she was the first woman he'd seen, or the woman he had first re-seen. There had been nurses, some of them beautiful, and he'd paid no attention to them. But Luise Obispo was part of his former life—and he didn't know what part. The

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reactions were there, but until he could find out why, he was denied access to the satisfactions.

From a very narrow angle, and only from that angle, he could see that there was still a light inside. It was dim, and if a person didn't know, he might pass by and not notice it.

His former observation about the Shelters was incorrect. Every dwelling might be occupied and he couldn't tell unless he examined them individually.

He stirred. The woman was a clue to his problem, but the clue itself was a far more urgent problem. Though his identity was important, he could build another life without it and the new life might not be worse than the one from which he had been forcibly removed.

Perhaps he was over-reacting, but he didn't think so: *his new life had to include this woman.*

He wasn't equipped to handle the emotion. He stumbled away from the door and found an unoccupied dwelling and went in without turning on the lights and lay down on the bed.

In the morning, he knew he had been here before. In the darkness he had chosen unknowingly but also unerringly. This was the place in which he had been retrogressed.

It was here that the police had picked him up.

THE counselor looked sleepily out of the screen. "I wish you people didn't have so much energy," he complained. Then he looked again and the sleepiness vanished. "I see you found it the first time."

Luis knew it himself, because there was a difference from the dwelling Luise lived in — not much, but perceptible to him. The counselor, however, must have a phenomenal memory to distinguish it from hundreds of others almost like it.

Borgenese noticed the expression and smiled. "I'm not an eidetic, if that's what you think. There's a number on the set you're calling from and it shows on my screen. You can't see it."

They would have something like that, Luis thought. "Why didn't you tell me this was it before I came?"

"We were pretty sure you'd find it by yourself. People who've just been retroed usually do. It's better to do it on your own. Our object is to have you recover your personality. If we knew who you were, we could set up a program to guide you to it faster. As it is, if we help you too much, you turn into a carbon copy of the man who's advising you."

Luis nodded. Give a man his adult body and mind and turn him loose on the problems which confronted him, and he would

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come up with adult solutions. It was better that way.

But he hadn't called to discuss that. "There's another person living in the Shelters," he said. "You found her three weeks before you found me."

"So you've met her already? Fine. We were hoping you would." Borgenese chuckled. "Let's see if I can describe her. Apparent age, about twenty-three; that means that she was originally between twenty-six or thirty-eight, with the probability at the lower figure. A good body, as you are probably well aware, and a striking face. Somewhat oversexed at the moment, but that's all right—so are you."

He saw the expression on Luis's face and added quickly: "You needn't worry. Draw a parallel with your own experience. There were pretty nurses all around you in retro-therapy, and I doubt that you noticed that they were female. That's normal for a person in your position, and it's the same with her.

"It works this way: you're both unsure of yourselves and can't react to those who have some control over their emotions. When you meet each other, you can sense that neither has made the necessary adjustments, and so you are free to release your true feelings."

He smiled broadly. "At the moment, you two are the only ones who have been retroed recently. You won't have any competition for six months or so, until you begin to feel comfortable in your new life. By then, you should know how well you really like each other.

"Of course tomorrow, or even today, we might find another person in the Shelter. If it's a man, you'll have to watch out; if a woman, you'll have too much companionship. As it is, I think you're very lucky."

Yeah, he was lucky—or would be if things were actually like that. Yesterday he would have denied it; but today, he'd be willing to settle for it, if he could get it.

"I don't think you understand," he said. "She took the same name that I did."

Borgenese's smile flipped over fast, and the other side was a frown. For a long time he sat there scowling out of the screen. "That's a hell of a thing to tell me before breakfast," he said. "Are you sure? She couldn't decide on a name before she left."

"I'm sure," said Luis, and related all the details of last night.

The counselor sat there and didn't say anything.

LUIS waited as long as he could. "You can trace *us* now," he said. "One person might

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be difficult. But two of us with nearly the same name, that should stick out big, even in a population of sixteen billion. Two people are missing from somewhere. You can find that."

The counselor's face didn't change. "You understand that if you were killed, we'd find the man who did it. I can't tell you how, but you can be sure he wouldn't escape. In the last hundred years there's been no unsolved murder."

He coughed and turned away from the screen. When he turned back, his face was calm. "I'm not supposed to tell you this much. I'm breaking the rule because your case and that of the girl is different from any I've ever handled." He was speaking carefully. "Listen. I'll tell you once and won't repeat it. If you ever accuse me, I'll deny I said it, and I have the entire police organization behind me to make it stick."

The counselor closed his eyes as if to see in his mind the principle he was formulating. "If we can catch a murderer, no matter how clever he may be, it ought to be easier to trace the identity of a person who is still alive. It is. *But we never try.* Though it's all right if the victim does.

"If I should ask the cooperation of other police departments, they wouldn't help. If the solution lies within an area over which I have jurisdiction and I find out who is responsible, I will be dismissed before I can prosecute the man."

Luis stared at the counselor in helpless amazement. "Then you're not doing anything," he said shakily. "You lied to me. You don't intend to do anything."

"You're overwrought," said Borgenese politely. "If you could see how busy we are in your behalf—" He sighed. "My advice is that if you can't convince the girl, forget her. If the situation gets emotionally unbearable, let me know and I can arrange transportation to another city where there may be others who are—uh—more compatible."

"But she's my wife," he said stubbornly.

"Are you sure?"

Actually Luis wasn't—but he wanted *her* to be, or any variation thereof she would consent to. He explained.

"As she says, there are a lot of factors," commented the counselor. "I'd suggest an examination. It may remove some of her objections."

He hadn't thought of it, but he accepted it eagerly. "What will that do?"

"Not much, unfortunately. It will prove that you two can have healthy normal children; but it won't indicate that you're not a

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member of her genetic family. And, of course, it won't touch on the question of legal family, brother-in-law and the like. I don't suppose she'd accept that."

She wouldn't. He'd seen her for only a brief time and yet he knew that much. He was in an ambiguous position; he could make snap decisions he was certain were right, but he had to guess at facts. He and the girl were victims, and the police refused to help them in the only way that would do much good. And the police had, or thought they had, official reasons for their stand.

Luis told the counselor just exactly what he thought of that.

"It's too bad," agreed the counselor. "These things often have an extraordinary degree of permanency if they ever get started."

If they ever got started! Luis reached out and turned off the screen. It flickered unsteadily—the counselor was trying to call him back. He didn't want to talk to the man; it was painful, and Borgenese had nothing to add but platitudes, and fuel to his anger. He swung open the panel and jerked the wiring loose and the screen went blank.

There was an object concealed in the mechanism he had exposed. It was a neat, vicious, little retrogression gun.

He got it out and balanced it gingerly in his hand. Now he had something else to work on! It was *the* weapon, of course. It had been used on him and then hidden behind the screen.

It was a good place to hide it. The screens never wore out or needed adjustment, and the cleaning robots that came out of the wall never cleaned there. The police should have found it, but they hadn't looked. He smiled bitterly. They weren't interested in solving crimes—merely in ameliorating the consequences.

Though the police had failed, he hadn't. It could be traced back to the man who owned it, and that person would have information. He turned the retro gun over slowly; it was just a gun; there were countless others like it.

He finished dressing and dropped the gun in his pocket. He went outside and looked across the court. He hesitated and then walked over and knocked.

"Occupied," said the door. "But the occupant is out. No definite time of return stated, but she will be back this evening. Is there any message?"

"No message," he said. "I'll call back when she's home."

He hoped she wouldn't refuse to speak to him. She'd been away from retro-therapy longer than he and possibly had developed

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her own leads—very likely she was investigating some of them now. Whatever she found would help him, and vice versa. The man who'd retroed her had done the same to him. They were approaching the problem from different angles. Between the two of them, they should come up with the correct solution.

He walked away from the Shelters and caught the belt to the center of town; the journey didn't take long. He stepped off, and wandered in the bright sunshine, not quite aimlessly. At length he found an Electronic Arms store, and went inside.

A ROBOT came to wait on him. "I'd like to speak to the manager," he said and the robot went away.

Presently the manager appeared, middle aged, drowsy. "What can I do for you?"

Luis laid the retrogression gun on the counter. "I'd like to know who this was sold to."

The manager coughed. "Well, there are millions of them, hundreds of millions."

"I know, but I have to find out."

The manager picked it up. "It's a competitor's make," he said doubtfully. "Of course, as a courtesy to a customer . . ." He fingered it thoughtfully. "Do you really want to know? It's just a freezer. Not at all dangerous."

Luis looked at it with concern. Just a freezer—not a retro gun at all! Then it couldn't have been the weapon used on him.

Before he could take it back the manager broke it open. The drowsy expression vanished.

"Why didn't you say so?" exclaimed the manager, examining it. "This gun has been illegally altered." He bent over the exposed circuits and then glanced up happily at Luis. "Come here, I'll show you."

Luis followed him to the small workshop in the back of the store. The manager closed the door behind them and fumbled among the equipment. He mounted the gun securely in a frame and pressed a button which projected an image of the circuit onto a screen.

The manager was enjoying himself. "Everybody's entitled to self-protection," he said. "That's why we sell so many like these. They're harmless, won't hurt a baby. Fully charged, they'll put a man out for half an hour, overload his nervous system. At the weakest, they'll still keep him out of action for ten minutes. Below that, they won't work at all." He looked up. "Are you sure you understand this?"

It had been included in his re-education, but it didn't come readily to his mind. "Perhaps

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you'd better go over it for me."

The manager wagged his head. "As I said, the freezer is legal, won't harm anyone. It'll stop a man or an elephant in his tracks, freeze him, but beyond that will leave him intact. When he comes out of it, he's just the same as before, nothing changed." He seized a pointer and adjusted the controls so as to enlarge the image on the screen. "However, a freezer can be converted to a retrogression gun, and that's illegal." He traced the connections with the pointer. "If this wire, instead of connecting as it does, is moved to here and here, the polarity is reversed. In addition, if these four wires are interchanged, the freezer becomes a retrogressor. As I said, it's illegal to do that."

THE manager scrutinized the circuits closely and grunted in disgust. "Whoever converted this did a sloppy job. Here." He bent over the gun and began manipulating micro-instruments. He worked rapidly and surely. A moment later, he snapped the weapon together and straightened up, handing it to Luis. "There," he said proudly. "It's a much more effective retrogressor than it was. Uses less power too."

Luis swallowed. Either he was mad or the man was, or perhaps it was the society he was trying to adjust to. "Aren't you taking a chance, doing this for me?"

The manager smiled. "You're joking. A tenth of the freezers we sell are immediately converted into retrogressors. Who cares?" He became serious. "Do you still want to know who bought it?"

Luis nodded—at the moment he didn't trust his voice.

"It will take several hours. No charge though, customer service. Tell me where I can reach you."

Luis jotted down the number of the screen at the Shelter and handed it to the manager. As he left, the manager whispered to him: "Remember, the next time you buy a freezer—ours can be converted easier than the one you have."

He went out into the sunlight. It didn't seem the same. What kind of society was he living in? The reality didn't fit with what he had re-learned. It had seemed an orderly and sane civilization, with little violence and vast respect for the law.

But the fact was that any school child—well, not quite *that* young, perhaps—but anyone older could and did buy a freezer. And it was ridiculously easy to convert a freezer into something far more vicious. Of course, it was illegal, but no one paid any attention to that.

This was wrong; it wasn't the way he remembered . . .

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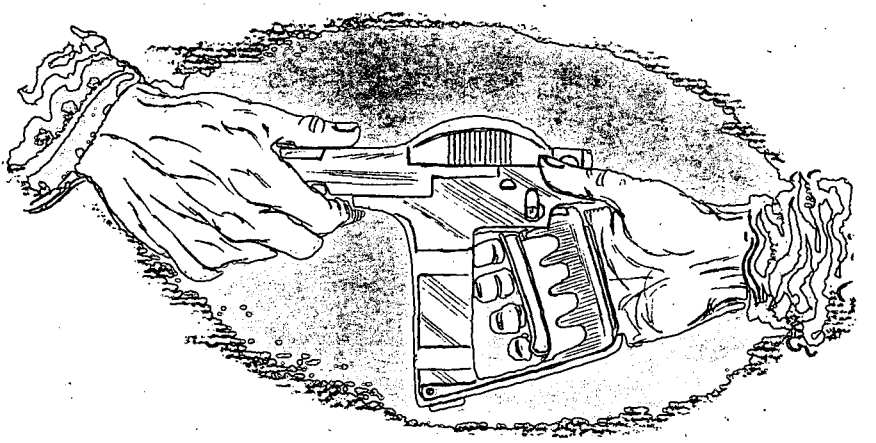
He corrected himself: he didn't actually remember anything. His knowledge came from tapes, and was obviously inadequate. Certain things he just didn't understand yet.

He wanted to talk to someone —but who? The counselor had given him all the information he intended to. The store manager had supplied some additional insight, but it only confused him. Luise—at the moment she was suspicious of him.

There was nothing to do except to be as observant as he could. He wandered through the town, just looking. He saw nothing that seemed familiar. Negative evidence, of course, but it indicated he hadn't lived here before.

Before what? Before he had been retrogressed. He had been brought here from elsewhere, the same as Luise.

He visited the spaceport. Again the evidence was negative; there was not a ship the sight of which tripped his memory. It had been too much to hope for; if he had been brought in by spaceship, it wouldn't still be around for him to recognize.



Late in the afternoon, he headed toward the center of town. He was riding the belt when he saw Luise coming out of a tall office building.

HE hopped off and let her pass, boarding it again and following her at a distance. As

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soon as they were out of the business district, he began to edge closer.

A few blocks from the Shelter she got off the belt and waited, turning around and smiling directly at him. In the interim her attitude toward him had changed, evidently—for the better, as far as he was concerned. He couldn't ignore her and didn't want to. He stepped off the belt.

"Hello," she said. "I think you were following me."

"I was. Do you mind?"

"I guess I don't." She walked along with him. "Others followed me, but I discouraged them."

She was worth following, but it was not that which was strange. Now she seemed composed and extraordinarily friendly, a complete reversal from last night. Had she learned something during the day which changed her opinion of him? He hoped she had.

She stopped at the edge of the Shelter area. "Do you live here?"

Learned something? She seemed to have forgotten.

He nodded.

"For the same reason?"

His throat tightened. He had told her all that last night. Couldn't she remember?

"Yes," he said.

"I thought so. That's why I didn't mind your following me."

Here was the attraction factor that Borgenese had spoken of; it was functioning again, for which he was grateful. But still, why? And why didn't she remember last night?

They walked on until she came to her dwelling. She paused at the door. "I have a feeling I should know who you are; but I just can't recall. Isn't that terrible?"

It was—frightening. Her identity was apparently incompletely established; it kept slipping backward to a time she hadn't met him. He couldn't build anything enduring on that; each meeting with her would begin as if nothing had happened before.

Would the same be true of him?

He looked at her. The torn dress hadn't been repaired, as he'd thought at first; it had been replaced by the robots that came out of the wall at night. They'd done a good job fitting her, but with her body that was easy.

It was frightening and it wasn't. At least this time he didn't have a handicap. He opened his mouth to tell her his name, and then closed it. He wasn't going to make that mistake again. "I haven't decided on a name," he said.

"It was that way with me too." She gazed at him and he could feel his insides sloshing around. "Well, man with no name, do you

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want to come in? We can have dinner together."

He entered. But dinner was late that night. He had known it would be.

IN the morning light, he sat up and put his hand on her. She smiled in her sleep and squirmed closer. There were compensations for being nobody, he supposed, and this was one of them. He got up quietly and dressed without waking her. There were a number of things he wanted to discuss, but somehow there hadn't been time last night. He would have to talk to her later today.

He slipped out of the house and went across the court into his own. The screen he had ripped apart had been repaired and put back in place. A voice chimed out as he entered: "A call came while you were gone."

"Let's have it."

The voice descended the scale and became that of the store manager. "The gun you brought in was sold six months ago to Dorn Starret, resident of Ceres and proprietor of a small gallium mine there. That's all the information on record. I trust it will be satisfactory."

Luis sat down. It was. He could trace the man or have him traced, though the last might not be necessary.

The name meant something to him—just what he couldn't say. Dorn Starret, owner of a gallium mine on Ceres. The mine might or might not be of consequence; gallium was used in a number of industrial processes, but beyond that was not particularly valuable.

He closed his eyes to concentrate. The name slid into vacant nerve cells that were responsive; slowly a picture formed, nebulous and incomplete at first. There was a mouth and then there were eyes, each feature bringing others into focus, unfolding as a germ cell divides and grows, calling into existence an entire creature. The picture was nearly complete.

Still with eyes closed, he looked at the man he remembered. Dorn Starret, five-eleven, one hundred and ninety, flesh that had once been muscular and firm. Age, thirty-seven; black hair that was beginning to recede from his forehead. The face was harder to define—strong, though slightly hard, it was perhaps good looking. It was the eyes which were at fault, Luis decided—glinting often—and there were lines on the face that ought not to be there.

There was another thing that set the man apart. Not clothing; that was conventional, though better than average. Luis stared into his memory until he was able to see it. *Unquestionably the*

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man was left-handed. The picture was too clear to permit a mistake on that detail.

He knew the man, had seen him often. How and in what context? He waited, but nothing else came.

Luis opened his eyes. He would recognize the man if he ever saw him. This was the man who owned the gun, presumably had shot him with it, and then had hidden it here in this room.

He thought about it vainly. By itself, the name couldn't take him back through all past associations with the man, so he passed from the man to Ceres. Here he was better equipped; re-education tapes had replaced his former knowledge of the subject.

THE asteroid belt was not rigidly policed; if there was a place in the System in which legal niceties were not strictly observed, it was there. What could he deduce from that? Nothing perhaps; there were many people living in the belt who were engaged in legitimate work: miners, prospectors, scientific investigators. But with rising excitement, he realized that Dorn Starret was not one of these.

He was a criminal. The gallium mine was merely an attempt to cover himself with respectability. How did Luis know that? He wasn't sure; his thought processes were hidden and erratic; but he knew.

Dorn Starret was a criminal—but the information wasn't completely satisfactory. What had caused the man to retrogress Luis and Luise Obispo? That still had to be determined.

But it did suggest this: as a habitual criminal, the man was more than ordinarily dangerous.

Luis sat there a while longer, but he had recalled everything that would come out of the original stimulus. If he wanted more, he would have to dig up other facts or make further contacts. But at least it wasn't hopeless—even without the police, he had learned this much.

He went over the room thoroughly once more. If there was anything hidden, he couldn't find it.

He crossed the court to Luise's dwelling. She was gone, but there was a note on the table. He picked it up and read it:

Dear man with no name:

I suppose you were here last night, though I'm so mixed up I can't be sure; there's so little of memory or reality to base anything on. I wanted to talk to you before I left but I guess, like me, you're out investigating.

There's always a danger that neither of us will like what we find. What if I'm married to an-

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other person and the same with you? Suppose . . . but there are countless suppositions—these are the risks we take. It's intolerable not to know who I am, especially since the knowledge is so close. But of course you know that.

Anyway I'll be out most of the day. I discovered a psychologist who specializes in restoring memory; you can see the possibilities in that. I went there yesterday and have an appointment again today. It's nice of him, considering that I have no money, but he says I'm more or less an experimental subject. I can't tell you when I'll be back but it won't be late.

Luise.

He crumpled the note in his hand. Memory expert. Her psychologist was that—in reverse. Yesterday he had taken a day out of her life, and that was why Luise hadn't recognized him and might not a second time.

HE leaned against the table. After a moment, he straightened out the note. A second reading didn't help. There it was, if he could make sense from it.

Luise and himself, probably in that order. There was no proof, but it seemed likely that she had been retrogressed first, since she had been discovered first.

There was also Dorn Starret, the criminal from Ceres who had hidden the gun in the Shelter that he, Luis, had been found in. And there was now a fourth person: the psychologist who specialized in depriving retrogression victims of what few memories they had left.

Luis grimaced: Here was information which, if the police would act on it properly . . . but it was no use, they wouldn't. Any solution which came out of this would have to arise out of his own efforts.

He folded the note carefully. It would be handy to have if Luise came back and didn't know who he was.

Meanwhile, the psychologist. Luise hadn't said who he was, but it shouldn't be difficult to locate him. He went to the screen and dialed the directory. There were many psychologists in it, but no name that was familiar.

He pondered. The person who had retroed Luise and himself—what would he do? First he would take them as far from familiar scenes as he could. That tied in with the facts. Dorn Starret came from Ceres.

Then what? He would want to make certain that his victims did not trace their former lives. And he would be inconspicuous in so doing.

Again Luis turned to the screen, but this time he dialed

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the news service. He found what he was looking for in the advertisements of an issue a month old. It was very neat:

DO YOU REMEMBER EVERYTHING — or is your mind hazy? Perhaps my system can help you recall those little details you find it so annoying to forget. MEMORY LAB.

That was all. No name. But there was an address. Hurriedly Luis scanned every succeeding issue. The advertisement was still there.

He was coming closer, very close. The ad was clever; it would attract the attention of Luise and himself and others like them, and almost no one else. There was no mention of fees, no claim that it was operated by a psychologist, nothing that the police would investigate.

Night after night Luise had sat alone; sooner or later, watching the screen, she had to see the ad. It was intriguing and she had answered it. Normally, so would he have; but now he was forewarned.

Part of the cleverness was this: that she went of her own volition. She would have suspected an outright offer of help—but this seemed harmless. She went to him as she would to anyone in business. A very clever setup.

But who was behind MEMORY LAB? Luis thought he knew. A trained psychologist with a legitimate purpose would attach his name to the advertisement.

Luis patted the retro gun in his pocket. Dorn Starret, criminal, and inventor of a fictitious memory system, was going to have a visitor. It wasn't necessary to go to Ceres to see him.

IT was the only conclusion that made sense. Dorn Starret had retroed him—the gun proved that—and Luise as well. Until a few minutes ago, he had thought that she had been first and he later, but that was wrong. They had been retrogressed together and Dorn Starret had done it; now he had come back to make certain that they didn't trace him.

Neat—but it wasn't going to work. Luis grinned wryly to himself. He had a weapon in his pocket that was assurance it wouldn't work.

He got off the belt near the building he had seen Luise leaving yesterday. He went into the lobby and located MEMORY LAB, a suite on the top floor. It wasn't necessary, but he checked rental dates. The lab had been there exactly three weeks. This tied in with Luise's release from

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retro-therapy. Every connection he had anticipated was there.

He rode up to the top floor. There wasn't a chance that Starret would recognize him; physically he must have changed too much since the criminal had last seen him. And while Luise hadn't concealed that she was a retro and so had given herself away, he wasn't going to make that mistake.

The sign on the door stood out as he came near and disappeared as he went by. MEMORY LAB, that was all—no other name, even here. Naturally. A false name would be occasion for police action. The right one would evoke Luise's and his own memories.

He turned back and went into the waiting room. No robot receptionist. He expected that; the man didn't intend to be around very long.

"Who's there?" The voice came from a speaker in the wall; the screen beside it remained blank, though obviously the man was in the next room. For a commercial establishment, the LAB was not considerate of potential clients.

Luis smiled sourly and loosened the weapon in his pocket. "I saw your advertisement," he said. No name; let him guess.

"I'm very busy. Can you come back tomorrow?"

Luis frowned. This was not according to plan. First, he didn't recognize the voice, though the speaker could account for that if it were intentionally distorted. Second, Luise was inside and he had to protect her. He could break in, but he preferred that the man come out.

He thought swiftly. "I'm Chals Putsyn, gallium importer," he called. "Tomorrow I'll be away on business. Can you give me an appointment for another time?"

There was a long silence. "Wait. I'll be out."

He'd *thought* the mention of gallium would do it. True, the mine Starret owned was probably worthless, but he couldn't restrain his curiosity.

THE door swung open and a man stepped out, closing the door before Luis could see inside.

He had erred—the man was not Dorn Starret.

The other eyed him keenly. "Mr. Chals Putsyn? Please sit down."

Luis did so slowly, giving himself time to complete a mental inventory. The man *had* to be Dorn Starret—and yet he wasn't. No disguise could be that effective. At least three inches shorter; the shape of his head was different; his body was slighter. Moreover, he was right-handed, not left, as Starret was.

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Luis had a story ready—names, dates, and circumstances. It sounded authentic even to himself.

The man listened impatiently. "I may not be able to help you," he said, interrupting. "Oddly enough, light cases are hardest. It's the serious memory blocks that I specialize in." There was something strange about his eyes —his voice too. "However, if you can come back in two days, late in the afternoon, I'll see what I can do."

Luis took the appointment card and found himself firmly ushered to the door. It was disturbing; Luise was in the next room, but the man gave him no opportunity to see her.

He stood uncertainly in the hall. The whole interview had taken only a few minutes, and during that time all his previous ideas had been upset. If the man was not Dorn Starret, who was he and what was his connection? The criminal from Ceres was not so foolish as to attempt to solve his problems by assigning them to another person. This was a one-man job from beginning to end, or ought to be.

Luis took the elevator to the ground floor and walked out aimlessly on the street. There was something queer about the man on the top floor. It took time to discover what it was.

The man was not Starret—but he was disguised. His irises were stained another color and the voice was not his own—or rather it was, but filtered through an artificial larynx inserted painfully in his throat. And his face had been recently swabbed with a chemical irritant which caused the tissues beneath his skin to swell, making his face appear plumper.

Luis took a deep breath. Unconsciously he had noticed details too slight for the average person to discern. This suggested something about his own past—that he was trained to recognize disguises.

But more important was this: that the man was disguised at all. The reason was obvious — to avoid evoking memories.

The man's name—what was it? It hadn't even been registered in the building—he'd asked on his way out. And Luise couldn't tell him. She was no longer a reliable source of information. He had to find out, and there was only one way that suggested itself.

Luise was still in there, but not in physical danger. The police were lax about other things, but not about murder, and the man knew that. She might lose her memories of the past few weeks; regrettable if it happened, but not a catastrophe.

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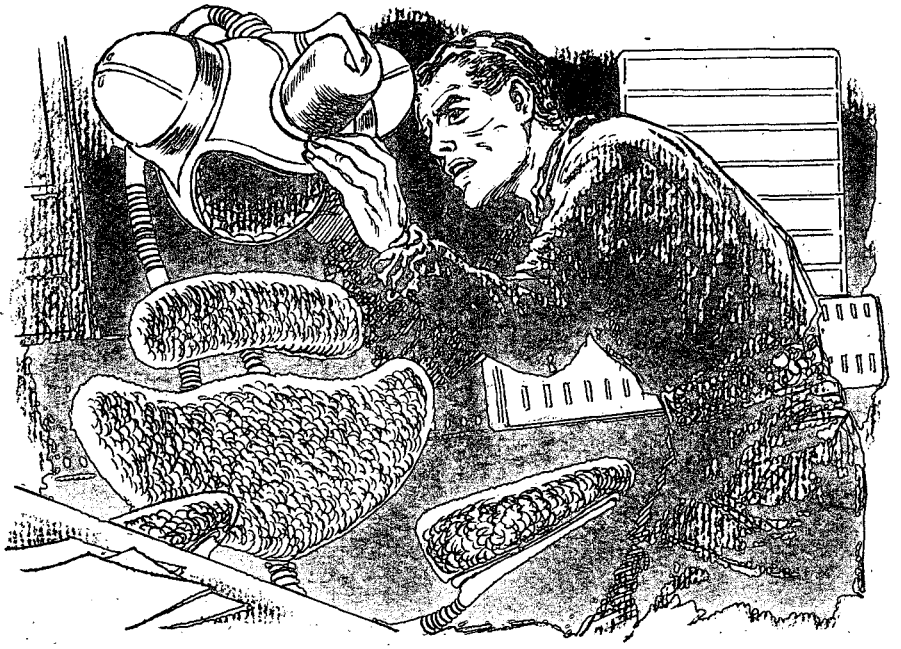

But who was the man and what was his connection?

He spent the rest of the day buying equipment—not much, but his money dwindled rapidly. He considered going back to the Shelter and then decided against it. By this time Luise would be back, and he would be tempted not to leave her.

After dark, when the lights in the offices went out, he rented an aircar and set it down on the top of the building.

HE walked across the roof, estimating the distances with practiced ease, as if he'd undergone extensive training and the apprenticeship period had been forgotten and only the skill remained. He knelt and fused two small rods to a portion of the roof, and then readjusted the torch and cut a small circular hole. He listened, and when there was no alarm, lifted out the section. There was nothing but darkness below.

He fastened a rope to the aircar. He dropped the rope through the hole and slid down. Unless he had miscalculated, he was where he wanted to be, having bypassed all alarm circuits. There were others inside, he was reasonably

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certain of that, but with ordinary precautions he could avoid them.

He flashed on a tiny light. He had guessed right; this was MEMORY LAB—the room he'd wanted to see this afternoon but hadn't been able to. In front of him was the door to the waiting room, and beyond that the hall. He swung the light in an arc, flashing it over a desk and a piece of equipment the nature of which he didn't know. Behind him was still another door.

The desk was locked, but he took out a small magnetic device and jiggled it expertly over the concealed mechanism and then it was unlocked. He went hurriedly through papers and documents, but there was nothing with a name on it. He rifled the desk thoroughly and then went to the machine.

He didn't expect to learn anything, but he might as well examine it. There was a place for a patient to sit, and a metal hood to fit over the patient's head. He snapped the hood open and peered into it. It seemed to have two functions. One circuit was far larger and more complicated, and he couldn't determine what it did. But he recognized the other circuit; essentially it was a retrogressor, but whereas the gun was crude and couldn't be regulated, this was capable of fine adjustment—enough, say, to slice a day out of the patient's life, and no more.

That fitted with what had happened to Luise. She had been experimented on in some way, and then the memory of that experiment had been erased. But the man had grown careless and had taken away one day too many.

He snapped the mechanism closed. This was the method, but he still didn't know who the man was nor why he found it necessary to do all this.

There was a door behind him and the answer might lie beyond it. He listened carefully, then swung the door open and went through.

The blow that hit him wasn't physical; nothing mechanical could take his nerves and jerk them all at once. A freezer. As he fell to the floor, he was grateful it was that and not a retro gun.

Lights flooded the place, and the man of the afternoon interview was grinning at him.

"I thought you'd be back," he said, pleased. "In fact, I knew you would."

SOMEWHERE he had blundered; but he didn't know how. Experimentally he wriggled his fingers. They moved a fraction of an inch, but no more. He was helpless and couldn't say anything. He wasn't quite sure at the moment that he wanted to.

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"You were right, I didn't recognize you physically," continued the man. "Nevertheless, you gave yourself away. The name you used this afternoon, Chals Putsyn, is *my* name. Do you remember now?"

Of course. He'd chosen Chals Putsyn at random, because he'd had to say something, and everything would have been all right—except it actually hadn't been a random choice. The associations had triggered the wrong words into existence.

His mind flashed back to the time he'd discussed names with Borgenese. What had he said?

Putsy. But it wasn't Putsy—it was Putsyn.

"You're very much improved," said the real Chals Putsyn, staring curiously at him. "Let me recommend the retro treatment to you. In fact I'd take it myself, but there are a few inconveniences."

Yeah, there were inconveniences—like starting over again and not knowing who you were.

But Putsyn was right: he was physically improved. A freezer knocked a man down and kept him there for half an hour. But Luis had only been down a few minutes, and already he could move his feet, though he didn't. It was a phenomenally fast recovery, and perhaps Putsyn wasn't aware of it.

"The question is, what to do with you?" Putsyn seemed to be thinking aloud. "The police are intolerant of killing. Maybe if I disposed of every atom . . ." He shook his head and sighed. "But that's been tried, and it didn't make any difference. So you'll have to remain alive—though I don't think you'll approve of my treatment."

Luis didn't approve—it would be the same kind of treatment that Luise had been exposed to, but more drastic in his case, because he was aware of what was going on.

Putsyn came close to drag him away. It was time to use the energy he'd been saving up, and he did.

Startled, Putsyn fired the freezer, but he was aiming at a twisting target and the invisible energy only grazed Luis's leg. The leg went limp and had no feeling, but his two hands were still good and that was all he needed.

He tore the freezer away and put his other hand on Putsyn's throat. He could feel the artificial larynx inside. He squeezed.

He lay there until Putsyn went limp.

WHEN there was no longer any movement, he sat up and pried open the man's jaws, thrusting his fingers into the

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mouth and jerking out the artificial larynx. The next time he would hear Putsyn's real voice, and maybe that would trigger his memory.

He crawled to the door and pulled himself up, leaning against the wall. By the time Putsyn moved, he had regained partial use of his leg.

"Now we'll see," he said. He didn't try to put anger in his voice; it was there. "I don't have to tell you that I can beat answers out of you."

"You don't know?" Putsyn laughed and there was relief in the sound. "You can kick me around, but you won't get your answers!"

The man had physical courage, or thought he did, and sometimes that amounted to the same thing. Luis shifted uneasily. It was the first time he'd heard Putsyn's actual voice; it was disturbing, but it didn't arouse concrete memories.

He stepped on the outstretched hand. "Think so?" he said. He could hear the fingers crackle.

Putsyn paled, but didn't cry out. "Don't think you can kill me and get away with it," he said.

He didn't sound too certain.

Slightly sick, Luis stepped off the hand. He couldn't kill the man—and not just because of the police. He just couldn't do it. He felt for the other gun in his pocket.

"This isn't a freezer," he said. "It's been changed over. I think I'll give you a sample."

Putsyn blinked. "And lose all chance of finding out? Go ahead."

Luis had thought of that; but he hadn't expected Putsyn to.

"You see, there's nothing you can do," said Putsyn. "A man has a right to protect his property, and I've got plenty of evidence that you broke in."

"I don't think you'll go to the police," Luis said.

"You think not? My memory system isn't a fraud. Admittedly, I didn't use it properly on Luise, but in a public demonstration I can prove that it does work."

Luis nodded wearily to himself. He'd half suspected that it did work. Here he was, with the solution so close—this man knew his identity and that of Luise, and where Dorn Starret came into the tangle—and he couldn't force Putsyn to tell.

He couldn't go to the police. They would ignore his charges, because they were based on unprovable suspicions . . . ignore him or arrest him for breaking and entering.

"Everything's in your favor," he said, raising the gun. "But there's one way to make you leave us alone."

"Wait," cried Putsyn, covering

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his face with his uninjured hand, as if that would shield him. "Maybe we can work out an agreement."

Luis didn't lower the gun. "I mean it," he said.

"I know you mean it—I can't let you take away my life's work."

"Talk fast," Luis said, "and don't lie."

He stood close and listened while Putsyn told his story.

This is what had happened, he thought. This is what he'd tried so hard to learn.

"I had to do it that way," Putsyn finished. "But if you're willing to listen to reason, I can cut you in—more money than you've dreamed of—and the girl too, if you want her."

Luis was silent. He wanted her—but now the thought was foolish. Hopeless. This must be the way people felt who stood in the blast area of a rocket—but for them the sensation lasted only an instant, while for him the feeling would last the rest of his life.

"Get up," he said.

"Then it's all right?" asked Putsyn nervously. "We'll share it?"

"Get up."

Putsyn got to his feet, and Luis hit him. He could have used the freezer, but that wasn't personal enough.

He let the body fall to the floor.

He dragged the inert form into the waiting room and turned on the screen and talked to the police. Then he turned off the screen and kicked open the door to the hall. He shouldered Putsyn and carried him up to the roof and put him in the aircar.

LUISE was there, puzzled and sleepy. For reasons of his own, Borgenese had sent a squad to bring her in. Might as well have her here and get it over with, Luis thought. She smiled at him, and he knew that Putsyn hadn't lied about that part. She remembered him and therefore Putsyn hadn't had time to do much damage.

Borgenese was at the desk as he walked in. Luis swung Putsyn off his shoulder and dropped him into a chair. The man was still unconscious, but wouldn't be for long.

"I see you brought a visitor," remarked Borgenese pleasantly.

"A customer," he said.

"Customers are welcome too," said the police counselor. "Of course, it's up to us to decide whether he *is* a customer."

Luise started to cross the room, but Borgenese motioned her back. "Let him alone. I think he's going to have a rough time."

"Yeah," said Luis.

It was nice to know that Luise liked him now—because she

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wouldn't after this was over.

He wiped the sweat off his forehead; all of it hadn't come from physical exertion.

"Putsyn here is a scientist," he said. "He worked out a machine that reverses the effects of the retro gun. He intended to go to everyone who'd been retrogressed, and in return for giving them back their memory, they'd sign over most of their property to him.

"Naturally, they'd agree. They all want to return to their former lives that bad, and, of course, they aren't aware of how much money they had. He had it all his way. He could use the machine to investigate them, and take only those who were really wealthy. He'd give them a partial recovery in the machine, and when he found out who they were, give them a quick shot of a built-in retro gun, taking them back to the time they'd just entered his office. They wouldn't suspect a thing.

"Those who measured up he'd sign an agreement with, and to the other poor devils he'd say that he was sorry but he couldn't help them."

Putsyn was conscious now. "It's not so," he said sullenly. "He can't prove it."

"I don't think he's trying to prove that," said Borgenese, still calm. "Let him talk."

Luis took a deep breath. "He might have gotten away with it, but he'd hired a laboratory assistant to help him perfect the machine. She didn't like his ideas; she thought a discovery like that should be given to the public. He didn't particularly care what she thought, but now the trouble was that she could build it too, and since he couldn't patent it and still keep it secret, she was a threat to his plans." He paused. "Her name was Luise Obispo."

HE didn't have to turn his head. From the corner of his eye, he could see startlement flash across her face. She'd got her name right; and it was he who had erred in choosing a name.

"Putsyn hired a criminal, Dorn Starret, to get rid of her for him," he said harshly. "That was the way Starret made his living. He was an expert at it.

"Starret slugged her one night on Mars. He didn't retro her at once. He loaded her on a spaceship and brought her to Earth. During the passage, he talked to her and got to like her a lot. She wasn't as developed as she is now, kind of mousy maybe, but you know how those things are —he liked her. He made love to her, but didn't get very far.

"He landed in another city on

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Earth and left his spaceship there; he drugged her and brought her to the Shelter here and retroed her. That's what he'd been paid to do.

"Then he decided to stick around. Maybe she'd change her mind after retrogression. He stayed in a Shelter just across from the one she was in. And he made a mistake. He hid the retro gun behind the screen.

"Putsyn came around to check up. He didn't like Starret staying there—a key word or a familiar face sometimes triggers the memory. He retroed Starret, who didn't have a gun he could get to in a hurry. Maybe Putsyn had planned to do it all along. He'd built up an airtight alibi when Luise disappeared, so that nobody would connect him with that—and who'd miss a criminal like Starret?

"Anyway, that was only part of it. He knew that people who've been retroed try to find out who they are, and that some of them succeed. He didn't want that to happen. So he put an advertisement in the paper that she'd see and answer. When she did, he began to use his machine on her, intending to take her from the present to the past and back again so often that her mind would refuse to accept anything, past or present.

"But he'd just started when Starret showed up, and he knew he had to get him too. So he pulled what looked like a deliberate slip and got Starret interested, intending to take care of both of them in the same way at the same time."

He leaned against the wall. It was over now and he knew what he could expect.

"That's all, but it didn't work out the way Putsyn wanted it. Starret was a guy who knew how to look after his own interests."

Except the biggest and most important one; there he'd failed.

Borgenese was tapping on the desk, but it wasn't really tapping—he was pushing buttons. A policeman came in and the counselor motioned to Putsyn: "Put him in the pre-trial cells."

"You can't prove it," said Putsyn. His face was sunken and frightened.

"I think we can," said the counselor indifferently. "You don't know the efficiency of our laboratories. You'll talk."

WHEN Putsyn had been removed, Borgenese turned. "Very good work, Luis. I'm pleased with you. I think in time you'd make an excellent policeman. Retro detail, of course."

Luis stared at him.

"Didn't you listen?" he said. "I'm Dorn Starret, a cheap crook."

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In that mental picture of Starret he'd had, he should have seen it at once. Left-handed? Not at all—that was the way a man normally saw himself in a mirror. And in mirror images, the right hand becomes the left.

The counselor sat up straight, not gentle and easygoing any longer. "I'm afraid you can't prove that," he said. "Fingerprints? Will any of Starret's past associates identify you? There's Putsyn, but he won't be around to testify." He smiled. "As final evidence let me ask you this: when he offered you a share in his crooked scheme, did you accept? You did not. Instead, you brought him in, though you thought you were heading into certain retrogression."

Luis blinked dazedly. "But—"

"There are no exceptions, Luis. For certain crimes there is a prescribed penalty, retrogression. The law makes no distinction as to how the penalty is applied, and for a good reason. If there was such a person, Dorn Starret ceased to exist when Putsyn retroed him—and not only legally."

Counselor Borgenese stood up. "You see, retroing a person wipes him clean of almost everything he ever knew—*right and wrong*. It leaves him with an adult body, and we fill his mind with adult facts. Given half a chance, he acts like an adult."

Borgenese walked slowly to stand in front of his desk. "We protect life. Everybody's life. *Including those who are not yet victims*. We don't have the death penalty and don't want it. The most we can do to anyone is give him a new chance, via retrogression. We have the same penalty for those who deprive another of his memory as we do for those who kill—with this difference: the man who retrogresses another knows he has a good chance to get away with it. The murderer is certain that he won't.

"That's an administrative rule, not a law—that we don't try to trace retrogression victims. It channels anger and greed into non-destructive acts. There are a lot of unruly emotions floating around, and as long as there are, we have to have a safety valve for them. Retrogression is the perfect instrument for that."

Luise tried to speak, but he waved her into silence.

"Do you know how many were killed last year?" he asked.

Luis shook his head.

"Four," said the counselor. "Four murders in a population of sixteen billion. That's quite a record, as anyone knows who reads Twentieth Century mystery novels." He glanced humorously at Luis. "You did, didn't you?"

Luis nodded mutely.

Borgenese grinned. "I thought

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so. There are only three types of people who know about fingerprints today, historians and policemen being two. And I didn't think you were either."

Luise finally broke in. "Won't Putsyn's machine change things?"

"Will it?" The counselor pretended to frown. "Do you remember how to build it?"

"I've forgotten," she confessed.

"So you have," said Borgenese. "And I assure you Putsyn is going to forget too. As a convicted criminal, and he will be, we'll provide him with a false memory that will prevent his prying into the past.

"That's one machine we don't want until humans are fully and completely civilized. It's been invented a dozen times in the last century, and it always gets lost."

He closed his eyes momentarily, and when he opened them, Luise was looking at Luis, who was staring at the floor.

"You two can go now," he said. "When you get ready, there are jobs for both of you in my department. No hurry, though; we'll keep them open."

Luis left, went out through the long corridors and into the night.

SHE caught up with him when he was getting off the belt that had taken him back to the Shelters.

"There's not much you can say, I suppose," she murmured. "What can you tell a girl when she learns you've stopped just short of killing her?"

He didn't know the answer either.

They walked in silence.

She stopped at her dwelling, but didn't go in. "Still, it's an indication of how you felt—that you forgot your own name and took mine." She was smiling now. "I don't see how I can do less for you."

Hope stirred and he moved closer. But he didn't speak. She might not mean what he thought she did.

"Luis and Luise Obispo," she said softly. "Very little change for me—just add Mrs. to it." She was gazing at him with familiar intensity. "Do you want to come in?"

She opened the door.

Crime was sometimes the road to opportunity, and retrogression could be kind.

—F. L. WALLACE

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In order to discover competent new writers of humanistic science fiction, the American Humanist Association and GALAXY *Science Fiction Magazine* have agreed to co-sponsor a Humanist Science Fiction Short Story Contest. The object of this contest is to find GOOD fiction—we are not interested in thinly disguised sermons. Although stories entered in the contest should have a humanistic approach, chief weight in the judging will be given to freshness of theme, sharp characterization and interpersonal conflict, and ingenuity of plot development and solution of the problem used as the basis of the story. Entrants who are not familiar with science fiction should study GALAXY, available for 35c at most newsstands, or from 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y.

All prize-winning stories will be printed in GALAXY. The first-prize story will also appear in *The Humanist*. For further information on the contest and literature describing the Humanist viewpoint, write to Humanist Story Contest, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

— RULES OF THE CONTEST —

- All entries must be between 2500 and 5000 words in length.
- Manuscripts must be typed in black, double-spaced, on plain white bond paper. The author's name and address must appear on the manuscript itself.
- There is no limit to the number of entries per student, but each must be accompanied by the following form or its equivalent:

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Signed .....(Faculty Member).....

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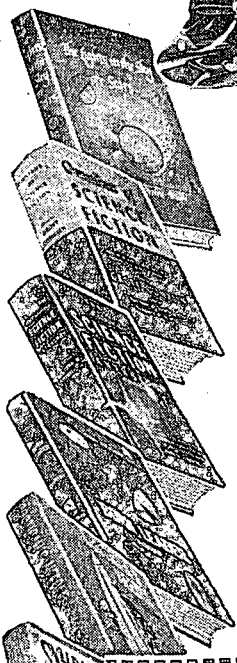

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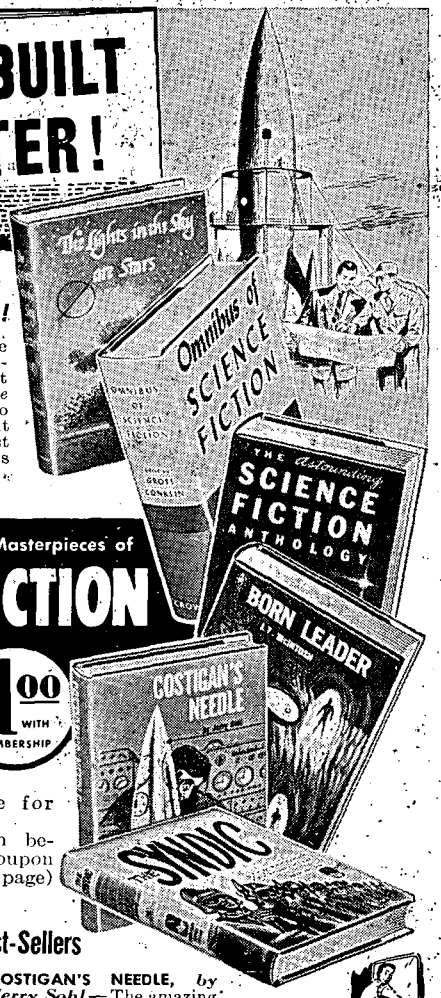

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